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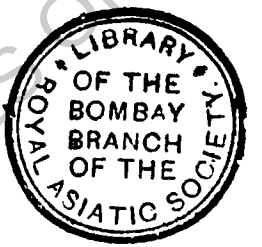
QUESTIONS ON HINDUISM

With Answers

BY

ANNIE BESANT,



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REPRINTED FROM
The Central Hindū College Magazine
FROM 1901 TO 1908 INCLUSIVE.
Benares: Theosophical Publishing Society.
Adyar: The Theosophist Office.

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FOREWORD.

VERY little is needed as introduction to this book. Many questions are sent in to the *Central Hindu College Magazine*, and questions constantly recur. It is wearisome to readers to find similar questions answered, over and over again; it is difficult for the questioner to find the answer, if he is referred to an old issue of the Magazine, perhaps out of print, yet his question is new to *him* and he wants an answer. To avoid the weariness and yet to satisfy the enquirer, the answers given in past years have been collected, classified, and are herein published. The answers, except those to which initials are appended, are mine. The collecting and classifying was most kindly done by Miss Palmer, B. Sc., and Mr. Ganpat Rai Saksena, to whom my thanks are due.

ANNIE BESANT.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON HINḌUISM.

HINḌUISM.

Q. What is the definition of the Hinḍû religion, and what are its distinctive features?

Ans. This cannot be fully answered in a few lines, but in the *Elementary Text-Book* it is answered at length. Hinḍuism is a religion based on the Veḍas, and organised in the Smṛtis; its most distinctive features are: the Samskâras, Shaucha, Yajña and Shrâddha, with the Varṇas and Âshramas.

Q. Is the Sanâtana Ḍharma the most ancient of all religions?

Ans. In the most general sense of the word it is the foundation of all religions—the Eternal Truth on which every religion is founded. In the more limited sense, in which it is synonymous with Hinḍûism, it is the most ancient of living religions, except the ancestor worship of China, which may be traced back to a time before the coming of the Âryan race.

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Q. Who is a Hiṇḍû? and what are the essential distinguishing features of a Hiṇḍû?

Ans. A Hiṇḍû is a man belonging to the 1st sub-race of the Fifth, or Âryan, Race. There was a great immigration of these people from the north, and they settled in India. They were the possessors of certain sacred books, and had a certain religion and polity. Their descendants are called Hiṇḍûs. A Hiṇḍû must therefore belong to a particular sub-division of humanity by birth; his sacred books are the Veḍas; his religion, the Sanâṭana Ḍharma, has certain definite doctrines, as the One Existence, Reincarnation and Karma, and certain ceremonies, as the Saṃskâras, Shrâḍḍha, Shaucha, etc.; his social polity is based on the four Castes. You had better study the *Elementary Text-Book*, which will give you very clear ideas on this subject. Some people have lately objected to the word 'Hiṇḍû' saying that it was originally given as a term of reproach, and that "Âryan" is a better name.

Q. The Veḍa is a revelation. Can you account for it?

Ans. The Veḍa, properly speaking, is the everlastingly existent Truth in the Supreme Mind. Portions of this are taught by the Îshvâra of a universe to those who are to be the Teachers in that universe, as 'the Veḍas.' Thus Viṣhṇu is said to

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refashion the Veḍa for the different Yugas.

Q. Is it better to learn all the khaṇdas of the Veḍas without understanding the meaning, or to learn at least one khaṇda with the full meaning?

Ans. Apparently to learn one small portion of the Veḍas with its meaning is better than to learn the whole of it by heart without understanding it. Manu expressly says in regard to Dharma:—

यस्तर्केणानु संधते सधर्मंवदनेतरः ।

Q. Are the stories in the Purâṇas facts, or are they fabricated by the wise to teach morality and religion?

Ans. Most of them are facts either historical or cosmical; some are allegories, conveying information. Many of the statements are descriptions of cosmical processes, or objects, as seen from a higher plane, where dimensions of matter exist that are not existent here, and where all the working intelligences are seen as well as the results which they produce.

Q. How do you account for the cosmography of the Purâṇas?

Ans. The worlds are described in the earlier Purâṇas as they are seen from the higher planes. The matter is dealt with in my lectures named *Avaṭâras.* Some of the later Purâṇas are unreliable.

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Q. In the Râmâyaṇa we read of Hanumân swallowing the Sun. What does this mean?

Ans. In this story, as in many others in the Purâṇas and Iṭihâsa, natural facts in early ages are related in their causal aspect instead of as mere effects. Hanumân is the son of Vâyu, the Wind Ḍeva, and in one aspect represents a consuming force (consider that Agni proceeds from Vâyu, and that Hanumân destroyed Lankâ). The sun gained his present place by many conflicts, while the nebula was changing to a system.

Q. Was the Mahâbhâraṭa composed by one man, or it is a series of stories published by Veḍa-Vyasa?

Ans. The *Mahâbhâraṭa* is a compilation, and according to the statements made in it was published in a longer and shorter form. An immense number of stories are introduced into it, alongside the main incidents of the poem.

Q. According to the Shâṣtras, is it necessary that we should act according to the four stages of life, the Âshramas?

Ans. What do you mean by necessary? The four stages, as laid down by the Shâṣtras, give the course of an orderly and well-regulated life, and it is highly advisable and conducive to evolution to lead such a life. A man who has devoted his youth to

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study and has remained continent, who gives his maturity to the duties of the household life, a good husband, father, master and citizen; who, in his elderly life, yields up worldly duties to his youngers and retires from active life into one of study and meditation; who in his old age leads the life of the ascetic, breaking all the bonds of desire, ready and willing to leave the earthly life for the heavenly; such a man has learned from human life its lessons, and has made as much progress as possible for him at his stage of evolution.

Q. Are the Sikhs Hindûs? What are the points of resemblance between Sikhs and Hindûs?

Ans. The Sikhs have been declared to be Hindûs by a legal decision of the Lahore High Court. You can find the answer to your second question in the lecture on Sikhism in *The Religious Problem in India.*

Q. Why should not Hinduism be a proselytising faith? It loses strength by conversions from its ranks, and does not supply their loss by incorporating really willing and aspiring souls.

Ans. Those who understand the law of karma, know that the Jîva is guided, in its rebirth into the physical world, into the circumstances most suited for its further evolution. Among these, religion is the most important, and the religion into

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which a man is born is usually that best fitted to aid his spiritual growth. A profound conviction of this truth had led to an aversion to proselytising. In rare cases, however, a soul is born into a religion for which his past does not fit him, other causes overpowering the tendency to seek his own, and then appears the strong inclination to change his religion. It might, perhaps, be desirable to admit such into Hinḍûism, if they earnestly desire it, but the initiative should always be taken by the would-be member, and not by the representatives of the religion. And in any case, it should be remembered that the important thing is the inner attitude not the outer form. (See also p. 31.)

Q. Can we convert a Muhammaḍan or a Christian to Hinḍûism, and give him the sacred thread?

Ans. No. Hinḍûism makes no converts at the present day. In the past it admitted into its fold those who were born outside it, and Hinḍûised large numbers of the tribes it conquered. Now it rejects outsiders completely, and, with the exception of the Ârya Samâj, will not even re-admit Hinḍûs who have left Hinḍûism and desire to re-enter. Whether this policy be a wise one is a question which should be considered by the leaders of Hinḍûism.

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Q. The Christians often call us superstitious; are we really so?

Ans. This statement is a mere impertinence, when made as to Hinḍûs generally; the ignorant are superstitious in every religion, and there are vast numbers of superstitious Christians as well as of Hinḍûs, Muhammaḍans, etc. If each religion would educate its own ignorant people, and thus lift them out of superstition, it would do more good than by sneering at the ignorant in its sister faiths.

Q. Why should not a Hindû embrace Christianity?

Ans. Would it not be more rational to ask: why should he? It is when a man makes a change, that he needs a reason for the change, and he should not change his religion unless for some very serious reasons. Christianity has nothing to offer to a Hinḍû that he cannot find in his own faith, and there is therefore no reason why he should embrace it. You will find two articles, "Why I am a Hinḍû," in the October and November issues of the *C. H. College Magazine*, in 1902.

Q. Our religion says that there was a deluge throughout the universe, and science says there was no creation. These ideas do not agree.

Ans. Hinḍûism does not speak of a deluge "throughout the universe;" deluges, or fire, may

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destroy living creatures on part of a world, or on a whole world, but they are not destructive of the universe. The statement that there is no creation, *i. e.* the beginning of something out of nothing, is consonant with Hiṇdû teaching. The *Bhagavad-Gîṭâ* says that matter and spirit are both अनादि, without beginning.

Q. Why is the Law of Progress disregarded or discarded by Hiṇdûism?

Ans. We are not aware that it is. On the contrary, we find men striving diligently to quicken their evolution, and to develop into Gods or Ṛṣhis, as the case may be. And the law of karma is itself a law of 'becoming.' It is perfectly true that falls as well as progress are mentioned, but that is in accordance with facts. We do not find continuous progress in nature, whether we study external nature, the individual Jīva, or the growth of nations.

Q. What are the seven Dvīpas?

Ans. Exoterically, seven divisions of the earth, existing long ago. Esoterically, the seven great continents which come successively into existence as the homes of the seven Root-races. You will find their names and situations in *The Pedigree of Man.*

Q. Where are the seven Pâṭâla Lokas? In the Advanced Text-Book they are described as literally

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surfaces, and within the earth. In the Secret Doctrine America is said to be Paṭâla.

Ans. If you read the *Text-Book* passage more carefully, you will see you have a little misunderstood it. "Usually called Ṭalas, literally surfaces' does not mean that the Ṭalas are surfaces, but that the Samskṛṭ word Ṭala is literally translated by the English word surface. Further, "regions 'within' the earth, that is, of grosser matter than the earth". All that is here asserted is that they are of grosser matter, and so are said to be "within". The inverted commas shew that the "within" is used in the sense "of grosser matter". Their exact position is not given; they may be below the earth's crust, but not necessarily so from what the books say.

Pâṭâla is sometimes used metaphorically, and H. P. B. noted that it was applied to America in some Hindû books.

Q. We read in Astronomy that the Sun and Moon are both uninhabitable, the former on account of intense heat, and the latter on account of the absence of atmosphere; on the other hand we read in our Purâṇas of Sûryaloka and Chandraloka. Which of these two contradictory statements is right?

Ans. In the first place, Sûryaloka and Chandraloka are not situated in the physical

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sun and physical moon; Sûryaloka is on the mânasic plane, and Chandraloka on the higher astral. So there is no contradiction in the two statements. Further, astronomers do not know enough about the conditions of the sun and moon to make any positive statements about them which can be relied upon. Further still, as people who go to these lokas are not in their physical bodies, the physical conditions there would not affect them.

Q. Are there Ṛshis in these days, and if so do we see them?

Ans. Ṛshis are not annihilated any more than any one else, and those who have been still are. They are rarely seen by any one in these days, but some see them.

Q. The ancient books tell how Ṛshis of old were gifted with high powers, and could restore life to a dead person. Why cannot the holy men of to-day do this? What kind of power was it which the ancients possessed? And how is it attainable to-day?

Ans. The recall of the man to his body is possible so long as the magnetic cord which unites the Prâṇamayakoṣha to the Annamayakoṣha remains unbroken, and the physical 'permanent atom' has not been withdrawn from its home in the physical body. If these events have occurred, the Jîva, so far as I know, cannot be

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recalled to his deserted tenement. Very few people in any age have the power to call the Jîva back, but the Ṛṣhis of the present possess it as much as the Ṛṣhis of the past. It is very rarely desirable to exercise such a power, for death comes at its right time, and Ṛṣhis work with the law. In almost all cases, the tender lesson of the Lord Buddha to the weeping mother, who brought to Him her dead babe, is the wisest and best of all lessons. Submission to the great law is the advice alike of wisdom and of compassion. Superhuman powers are attained by purity, asceticism, and yogic practices.

Q. If our mind be always holy and spiritual, is it essential that we should go on pilgrimages?

Ans. No. Pilgrimages are never 'essential,' but they are often very helpful, and are always useful and instructive, if properly carried out. In the old days, when pilgrims travelled on foot, a pilgrimage was an education; now when crowds are packed into railway carriages, and whirled through the country, pilgrims learn little or nothing, and there remains only the possible use of dwelling in a good atmosphere in the sacred place, if its atmosphere has not been destroyed by ignorant and greedy priests.

Q. In The Evolution of Life and Form seven

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planes are given and seven tattvas. In the Bhagavad-Gîtâ, vii. 4, prakṛti is said to be eightfold. How are these statements to be reconciled?

Ans. The classifications are different, but one does not exclude the other. The Sâṅkhya sequence of evolution is here followed by Shrî Kṛshṇa, Manas, Buddhi and Ahamkâra; sometimes Ahamkâra is called Âdi-tattva, and Buddhi Mahâ-tattva. Manas is generally reckoned as one of the Indriyas, as in *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* xiii, 5, and xv, 7.

Q. Please explain, "the days and nights of God follow each other"?

Ans. The period during which a system such as our solar system lasts is called "a day of Brahmâ"; we are now living in "a day of Brahmâ" and this day will go on till the solar system is worn out. Then will follow "a night of Brahmâ," the solar system being, as it were, dead. After this will come "another day of Brahmâ," when He will re-form the system, and then another "night", and so on. Just as a man wakes up in the morning, works during the day, and sleeps when the night comes, so does Brahmâ wake and work and sleep.

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THE TRIMÛRṬÎ.

Q. There are said to be three aspects of the Supreme; Brahmâ the Creator, Viṣhṇu the Preserver, and Mahâḍeva the Destroyer. Why is He worshipped under two aspects only, the third, Brahmâ, being worshipped only in Ajmere?

Ans. Because the third Aspect, Brahmâ, seems to belong more to the past, to the bringing of this universe into existence. Viṣhṇu, as the Preserver, and Mahâḍeva, as the Emancipator, seem to enter more closely into man's present life, and his thoughts therefore turn to them more readily.

Q. Who created the universe—Brahmâ, Viṣhṇu or Shiva?

Ans. Brahmâ is the manifestation of the activity of Deity, and is therefore the creator, Viṣhṇu preserves and maintains, Shiva destroys, calling all to rest for the night of Pralaya. You had better study the *Elementary* and *Advanced Text-Books.*

Q. Why is the worship of Brahmâ neglected?

Ans. Brahmâ's work was concerned with the early stages of the evolution of matter, and though

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still going on, is not concerned with the present growth of humanity. Hence He is not worshipped. When we say this, we mean that Îshvara is not now worshipped as the Creator, but as the Preserver, Vishṇu. In the Trimûrṭi, we see Îshvara in His three chief aspects, but all are one really.

Q. Why is there no symbolic worship of Brahmâ alone in the Hindu Ṭrimûrṭi?

Ans. Because His action, so far as humanity is concerned is over. He embodies creative activity, Kriyâ, and falls into the background when that activity has done its work, and the system passes into the upholding and preserving care of Vishṇu. Hence temples are not erected to Him, and no worship is offered.

Q. Why is Brahmâ creator, and not created?

Ans. Brahmâ is the name given in Hinḍûism to the great Being who shaped the primeval matter into the matter of which this universe is composed. He is therefore called "the Creator," but the English word 'creator' is not a good one, as in English it carries the meaning, when ascribed to God, of producing from nothing. Brahmâ is the Supreme Being in activity, the emanator of worlds, and, as a manifestation of the all-pervading life, He is uncreated, as indeed the Self is everywhere uncreated, whether in Brahmâ or in men.

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Q. When Brahmâ, Vishṇu and Mahesha are forms of Mahâvishṇu, why should Brahmâ be subject to destruction?

Ans. All forms disappear at the Mahâpralaya; your phrase "forms of" implies transitoriness. The Divine Life remains, but the forms adopted by that Life during a period of manifestation disappear at its close.

Q. Why should people see so much difference between Vishṇu and Shiva?

Ans. If the people antagonise each other, it is because of ignorance. Vishṇu represents the preservative element, and Shiva the destroying. The One draws together and maintains forms, the Other liberates by destroying forms. Both are equally necessary, and both are aspects of the One.

Q. Is there any difference between Vishṇu and Shiva? If so, who is considered the greater?

Ans. Îshvara is one, but He manifests His life in three aspects, Brahmâ, Vishṇu and Shiva, or Sat, Chit, and Ânanda. When He emanates a world, He is called Brahmâ; while He is maintaining it, He is called Vishṇu; when He takes it back to Himself, He is called Shiva. No one aspect is greater than another; He is the same Îshvara in each. Men worship Him under the aspect which attracts them most, and which is the most suitable

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for their spiritual progress at the time. The ignorant and the fanatical see differences, and as long as they do so, they "pass from death to death".

Q. One Purâṇa praises only Viṣhṇu, another Shiva, another Ḍurgâ. Which ought we to follow?

Ans. The Devas and Devîs are all manifestations of Îshvara; there is no rivalry between them. A man should worship that manifestation of Îshvara which most attracts him. Speaking very generally, the manifestations named Viṣhṇu and Lakṣhmi are most suitable for householders, and those named Shiva and Ḍurgâ for ascetics.

Q. Does Shiva lead sinners also to the Peace?

Ans. The answer to this is to be found in the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*, ix. 30.

अपि चेत्सुदुराचारो भजते मामनन्यभाक्।
साधुरेव स मंतव्यः सम्यग्व्यवसितो हि सः॥

"Even if the most sinful worship me with undivided heart, he too must be accounted righteous, for he hath rightly resolved."

This turning of the heart to the Lord of purity cannot take place unless the love of purity has sprung up in the heart, and unless it has turned away from the evil previously followed. That this is so is shown by the next half shloka.

क्षिप्रं भवति धर्मात्मा शश्वच्छांतिं निगच्छति।

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"Speedily he becomes dutiful, and goeth to the eternal Peace."

The 'sinner' cannot go to the Peace, but the sinner become righteous must go thither.

Q. What is meant by the wife of Shiva?

Ans. In any universe the Supreme Lord reveals Himself as male and female, these two sides of His nature being necessary for evolution. The female side, nature, matter, proceeds from the Devî. She is the mother, as Îshvara is the Father.

Q. If the Buddha was the incarnation of Vishṇu, why are his teachings regarded as distinct from Hinḍûism?

Ans. They were not so regarded during His lifetime, nor for a long time afterwards. Brâhmaṇas were among His disciples, and crowds listened to Him gladly wherever He went. He was regarded as a great spiritual Hinḍû teacher, and was welcomed everywhere. The opposition to His teachings arose later, when they had been much materialised by some of His followers.

Q. What is the calendar year of the birth of Shrî Kṛshṇa and Shrî Râma, and why did the former play with the Gôpîs?

Ans. The death of Shrî Kṛshṇa occurred about the year B. C. 3100. I do not know if the data are available for calculating His birth from

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this. No historical data exist to show the date of the birth of Shrî Râma. The second question is dealt with at length in the *C. H. College Magazine* for July, 1901.

Q. What was the end of our Lord Shrî Kṛshṇa? Was he killed by the chance arrow of a hunter?

Ans. The time had come for Him to leave the physical body He had taken for certain purposes. His work was finished. It was not a "chance" arrow.

Q. What is the calendar date of the births of Shrî Kṛshṇa and Shrî Râma?

Ans. No calendar date can be given. Shrî Kṛshṇa left his body at the commencement of the Kali Yuga, a little over 5000 years ago, Shrî Râma lived towards the end of the Ṭreṭa Yuga.

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ÎSHVARA.

Q. What is the true definition of Îshvara?

Ans. Îshvara is the Supreme Lord. Some Hindûs confine the title to the Saguṇa Brahman; others extend it to the Supreme Ruler of a single universe, so that each universe, or system or Brahmâṇḍa has its own Îshvara. This is the view taken in the *Ḍevi Bhâgavaṭa.*

Q. Which is the supreme God, Parabrahman or Îshvara?

Ans. Parabrahman is the All, sometimes called Nirguṇa Brahman. Îshvara is the manifested Deity, the Saguṇa Brahman, the Lord. These names do not imply opposition, but the unconditioned and the conditioned. Read the chapter on the One Existence, in the *Elementary Text-Book.*

Q. What is the difference between Shiva and Parameshvara?

Ans. Shiva is the name of Îshvara in a particular aspect, as the Destroyer of effete forms and the Liberator of the Jîva. So an Emperor may

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be the General of his army, the Judge of his subjects, and still, in any character, he is the Emperor. So Îshvara is ever Himself, but He shows Himself in different forms. Parameshvara is not Nirguṇa, but Saguṇa.

Q. Is Shrî Kṛshṇa God? Is He, or Shiva, or Ḍurgâ, the highest? The followers of each are jealous of the other, and make many quarrels.

Ans. These names are given to manifestations of Îshvara, and questions as to whether one is higher than another are inappropriate. The same Îshvara shews Himself out in many forms, and each has its special use and attractiveness. A devotee may worship one form to the exclusion of others, but that is merely because it happens to attract him. Men are very various, and are attracted by different manifestations. Quarrelling over the forms is merely a sign that the devotees are ignorant, and wiser people should try to enlighten them.

Q. Why do the Purâṇas differ on the supremacy of one God over others? Who is really the Creator and Governor of the world?

Ans. Some of the Purâṇas are written by sectarians, and thus exalt one aspect of God over another. There is but one God. When He brings forth a universe, He appears as Brahmâ; when He governs it, as Viṣhṇu; when He draws it back into

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Himself, as Shiva. "There is but one; sages name Him variously."

Q. How do we know that there is but one God?

Ans. Indirectly, by reason, devotion, and purity of life. Directly, by the witness within us of the Self. Problems of this kind have to be resolved by deep and strenuous thinking, not by asking questions. We must answer them for ourselves.

Q. How can the existence of God be proved?

Ans. Long and careful study of nature proves the probability of a 'Divine Architect,' who builds the worlds. Devotion to Îshvara enables a man to feel His existence, and to gain strength and peace from Him. But the ultimate proof lies in the Self within; by realising the Divine Self in ourselves we know the Divine Self outside ourselves. But this question is not one that boys can, as a rule, understand, and the best way for them is to study, to worship, to lead a pure life, so that, when they are men, they may understand these matters.

Q. Can you prove the existence of God?

Ans. This question is sent to me rather often, so I put it in here. But the question is too deep a one for these columns. No purely intellectual argument affords a complete demonstration of the existence of God, satisfactory to all minds. His "only proof is the consciousness in the Self." Each

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of us is quite sure that he himself exists; thus we have many existences, each sure of itself; but these cannot arise severally and independently, any more than a fountain can spring up in the air where there is no water; these selves arise from One Self, are parts of One Self, and that Self is God. Hence is the conviction of the Self His only proof. But the many lines of proof that converge towards the Divine Existence need long and careful study and the experience of life, and a boy cannot expect to understand right off the problem that has exercised the profoundest minds for ages. Live nobly and purely, and you will find God, and no doubt of His existence will finally trouble you.

Q. What proofs can be given of the existence of God?

Ans. An answer to a question of such deep import can hardly be given in a 'Letter-Box.' All the proofs that can be given amount to a high degree of probability rather than to a certainty. Complete proof lies only in the realisation of the Divine Self in us, our true Self, that recognises the Divine Self without us by identity of nature. As a man grows purer, wiser, more loving, he begins to know God, and no more needs proof of His existence than he needs proofs of the light by which he sees.

Q. God is in everything. Is it that the thing itself is God?

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Ans. God is in everything, but each separate thing cannot be said to be by itself God, though it may be said to be a part of God. A part is not the same as the whole. (You can read about the inner and outer meanings of sacrifice in the *Elementary Text-Book* in the chapters on the "Law of Sacrifice" and "The five Sacrifices".)

Q. Is not God formless and ubiquitous? When He is so, why should one worship an idol, or go to a temple?

Ans. God is both formless and in all forms; many people find it easier to think of God in a form, and such people are helped by the use of images. He is everywhere, and may everywhere be worshipped, but many feel His presence more in a place set apart for worship, away from worldly sights and sounds.

Q. Does God exist? If so, in what form? How can we see Him?

Ans. God is existence; we live, because He lives. In endless forms, through some of which more of Him shines than through others. We see Him, as we see the Self in all beings, all beings in the Self.

Q. Why do we not see God?

Ans. A Pandit so answered this: You cannot touch, hear, see, smell and taste everything. For

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a particular thing we apply a particular organ to know it. Suppose I wish to know the degree of rigidity of my pen ; I won't smell it, but use my hand. If I wish to know the taste of sugar, I won't feel it, but put it on the tongue. And so for every thing. Thus to see God we must have a pure (in the above cases soundness of the organs is implied) mind. And mind can only be pure when we lead a virtuous life. Therefore in order to know God we must needs lead a virtuous life. And because most of us have not pure minds, therefore we do not see God.

Q. Is there anything outside words and letters to make us feel God?

Ans. Words and letters can never make us feel God. He is felt only by the Inner Self, the portion of Himself which lives in each of us ; we feel Him because He is akin to us, we are of His own nature. His "only proof is the consciousness in the Self." Many intellectual arguments may be adduced in support of this inner conviction ; the One Existence may be shown to be a philosophical necessity, and the manifestation of the primal Duality, Pratyagâtmâ and Mûlaprakṛti a cosmic necessity. Pratyagâtmâ emotionally contemplated, is Îshvara, the Supreme Lord.

Q. What is the meaning of the phrase that God is formless?

Ans. God is everything, includes everything

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in Himself, is the life by which everything exists. Hence there is no one form that can be ascribed to Him: He is in all forms. He shews more of Himself in some special forms, in order to give men an Object of devotion; such are the forms of Mahâdeva, of Vishṇu, of Shrî Kṛshṇa, and others. You will find it more useful to think of one of these, than to puzzle yourself over statements like the above.

Q. Please explain: "I am the gambling of the cheat" etc. How is this consistent with the divine goodness of the Lord?

Ans. There is only one source of all, one Life in all, one Self in all. The Self is in the gambler as much as in the saint, but in the former He is far more thickly coated with Avidyâ than in the latter. The gambler learns a useful lesson from his gambling through the misery that follows it, and in the gambling itself learns quickness of observation and other qualities. So long as the Self in us is learning his early lessons, he will make many errors, and these errors are followed by suffering. God teaches by 'evil' as well as by 'good'. He is in both. He uses 'evil' to call out our forces in resistance, 'good' to turn those forces to higher ends. When a man twists this great truth into an encouragement to do evil, because God is also in it, he finds God therein as a scourge instead of as a supporting staff.

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Q. In what sense is the word Ḍharma used in the "Bhagavaḍ-Gîṭâ," iii, 35; iv, 7; xviii. 66?

Ans. There is no one English word which is the full translation of the word Ḍharma; in the first quotation it means 'duty'; the duty which entailed upon us by birth and circumstances is better for us than the duty of another. In the second quotation 'righteousness' is the meaning—the general discharge of duty by all people. In the third it may mean again duty, or, possibly, religious rites: "abandoning all religious ceremonies, come unto me alone for shelter". Ḍharmas, the plural, is often used in this sense.

Q. Why does Shrî Kṛshṇa say that no one but Ârjuna can see Him in the form revealed on Kurukṣhetra (Bhagavaḍ-Gîṭâ 11. 48.) when apparently Sanjaya also saw it?

Ans. The statement is that none had ever seen that Form but Ârjuna (Shl. 47), and that no sacrifices nor austerities could win the vision of it. The second clause evidently means that no external work could open the 'Divine Eye' (shl. 8), which alone could see that vision. But this does not exclude the possibility of Its being seen by Sanjaya, who equally had not won the vision by external works but was allowed to see in order to record it for the benefit of others. The first clause seems merely to mean that It had not been

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previously revealed to any one, but this does not include the seeing of It at that time by Sanjaya or subsequently by others, whose spiritual growth rendered possible the opening of the Divine Eye in them also.

Q. If God be omnipresent, why should He be worshipped in one thing rather than in another?

Ans. A little thought would enable a student to answer this question for himself. It is wise to choose for help in realising Îshvara either some natural object, the magnetism of which has not been polluted by contact with the passions and desires of men, or an artificial object which is made to represent some divine characteristic. An artificial object in ordinary use, made to serve some human need, would not be an appropriate image of Îshvara nor raise the mind to Him. The mind would go naturally to the ordinary use of the object, and would not be raised by it to the Lord.

Q. If God is all-powerful, is He not also all-merciful? Can He not forgive all our sins if we pray? if so, what is the use of the law of karma?

Ans. God's own nature is expressed in His universe, in what we call the "laws of Nature". The invariability of these laws is the rock on which everything rests; if they could vary, we should have no certainties in life, progress would be impossible,

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knowledge non-existent. If by 'forgiveness' you mean inconsequence—and otherwise there is no meaning in your question—there is no forgiveness in nature. Man may turn round when he is doing wrong, and then he feels in accord with the Good Law, and calls this "the sense of forgiveness," but it is he who has changed, not God. God is never angry with Himself in us, so cannot change to kindness; He is always kind. We make barriers against Him; He never makes one against us. When we pull down a barrier we have made, and let Him shine on us, we say we are "forgiven". The law of karma is the changeless law of consequence, of order, and therefore of harmony and life.

Q. Does God sympathise with human sorrow, and can He help us against bad karma?

Ans. God, in one or other of His manifestations, sympathises with us as a father with the little sorrows of his children. Beings higher than ourselves do not think our troubles are as serious as we imagine them to be. Karma is a reflection of the Divine Nature, and works for our helping, whether we call it 'good' or 'bad'. It is, we may say, God outside us teaching us. The direct help is from God inside us, and more and more of His life flows into us and helps us from within, as we turn our thoughts towards Him. This does not change

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the prârabdha karma, but it changes our attitude to it.

Q. God is not limited by time and space, yet He is sometimes said to be born. How can this be explained?

Ans. God is not limited by time and space, but He manifests Himself in time and space. He is present in every thing, in every form in the universe, but is not limited by any of them. Only a small part of His splendor shines out through them. When a body is constructed specially to show out more of the Divine Nature than is usual, and that body is not inhabited by a separate human Jîva, such a body is said to be a Divine Incarnation. But it would be inaccurate to say "God is born". A body is born in which more of the Divine Life is manifested than is usually seen.

Q. Why does Îshvara take His Avatâras in India only, and not in any other land?

Ans. The various religions of the world have had their Avatâras; they are not confined to India. The earlier Avatâras were not in India, and occurred long before the Âryan, or Fifth Râce, appeared. The Avatâras were not all on the same level, though in all some of the Divine Power was manifested. Shrî Krishna is spoken of as a Pur-

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ânavatâra, Vishṇu Himself. He told Arjuna that He had been the Ṛshi Nârâyaṇa.

Q. Can you prove that Jesus is a man and not God?

Ans. God is in all men, and in Jesus as in others. More of the Divine Life shone out from Him than from the majority of people, but the difference is in degree, not in kind. If any one asserts that the difference is in kind, then the person making an assertion so improbable on the face of it has the duty of proving its truth. Jesus was born as a man, grew as a man, behaved as a man, died as a man; all this is proof of His manhood. If He were God, save as all men are God, the proofs should be given.

Q. How is it that the commandments of one and the same God vary so widely and are even antagonistic, as taught by different prophets in different countries? Muhammad taught that there is one God, Buddha that there is none, Hinduism that there are 33 crores.

Ans. Moral precepts are not at variance on serious matters, but shew a wonderful similarity; they vary in sublimity, according to the capacity of the people to whom they were addressed. Prophets taught various social customs, and gave different precepts on many points, because of the

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different intellectual capacities and social needs of the people they addressed. You are not quite accurate as to the teaching of the Lord Buḍḍha and of Hinḍûism; the Buḍḍha recognised the Ḍevas—usually translated 'Gods'—as you may see in the reports of His teachings, and expressed no opinion on the existence of the all-pervading ETERNAL, so that we may suppose He was at one with Hinḍûism on this. Hinḍuism emphatically asserts the existence of the One: "One only, without a second," and the crores of Ḍevas are the 'Shining Ones,' the Christian 'Angels,' not 'God'. The Hinḍû name for God is Brahman.

Q. If God is one, why do men change their religion?

Ans. Men change their religion because of ignorance. God may be found through any religion, and most people are born into the religion which is most fitted to help them. Sometimes, when a religion is taught in a very unintelligent way, an intellectual man may throw it off in its unintelligent form, and may not later, even when he sees its better forms, find himself satisfied with them, or inclined to resume his former position as a member of that faith. He may then accept some other form of religion, more suitable to his own temperament. Religions are like vessels into which water is poured; the water takes the shape of the

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vessels, but remains pure water fit to quench thirst; so spiritual life is poured into all religions, and takes shape according to the religions, but remains one spiritual life, able to quench the thirst of the Spirit for the knowledge of God.

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Ḍevas, Suras and Âsuras.

Q.—Why do Hinḍûs believe in many Gods, instead of in the One Supreme?

Ans.—You are confusing Brahman with the Ḍevas. Brahman is the Supreme, the One Life, the "One without a second". The Ḍevas are superphysical Beings, of great power and intelligence, who are the Ministers of the Lord of a universe. No educated Hinḍû confuses Brahman and the Ḍevas, any more than an educated man confuses the Emperor and his officials. Yet a man may quite reasonably apply to an official for help, without any want of loyalty to the Emperor; and so may a man ask a Ḍeva for help, without any disloyalty to the Supreme. This was all explained in an article in the C. H. C. *Magazine*, in 1901.

Q.—Can we see the Ḍevas?

Ans.—The Ḍevas cannot be seen with the physical eyes, unless they choose to "materialise" themselves, that is to draw into their bodies some solid matter from the physical world. This they

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very rarely do. But man has an inner eye, which is opened by purity, devotion, and Yoga, and when this is opened he can see the Ḍevas as plainly as we see ordinary men.

Q.—Why is the Ḍevî Kâlî made to look so terrible, and why was She propitiated by Thugs and dacoits?

Ans.—She is made to look terrible because She is the embodiment of the destructive energies of nature; storms, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, are not very pleasant things to look at, but they are all divine agencies. Thugs and dacoits worshipped Kâlî because they supposed that they could use some of Her powers to destroy their enemies. They had not the knowledge to invoke Her successfully, as does the western scientist when he uses electricity, one of Her forces, to execute a condemned criminal.

Q.—Do fairies, devils, and ghosts exist?

Ans.—"Fairies" are nature-spirits, Ḍevaṭas, who look after plants, minerals and animals. "Devils" are Asuras, beings of the rank of Ḍevas, but working against evolution instead of for it. "Ghosts" are Preṭas, human beings who have put off their physical bodies, and are living in the world next to this before going on to Svarga.

Q.—What are devils, or evil spirits, and in what state do they exist?

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Ans.—Worlds above the physical have inhabitants, just as our earth has. It is not to be supposed that our globe is the only inhabited spot in the vast universe. The inhabitants are good, bad and indifferent, as are people here. The good ones are sometimes called Ḍevas, or angels, the bad ones Asuras, or devils. Christians regard angels as being quite good, and devils as being quite bad; but that is not the case. Both are really servants of the Supreme Lord, but their work in connexion with humanity differs. The Ḍevas, or Suras, serve Him by helping on evolution; the Asuras serve Him by opposing it, and thus calling out and strengthening the divine powers in man. We call those who help us "good," and those who oppose us "bad," and this usage is customary in religions, in order to stir up man to resist the promptings of the Asuras.

There are good and bad beings in every world, dense or subtle. None of the inhabitants of these worlds are all-perfect, none all-sinful. As there are bad men in this world, so there are bad beings in the astral world, and some folk call these "devils". But as the word "devils" has many untrue connotations, it is better to avoid its use.

Q.—What are devils, bhûṭas, or evil spirits, and how do they come to be possessed of wonderful

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powers, as in fire-walking?

Ans.—This world is only one of the innumerable worlds that are inhabited. The Bhuvarloka is the world next to this, and in this world bhûṭas and many other beings live, some good some bad. They do not have physical bodies, but bodies of finer matter, and can do with these many things impossible for beings clothed in physical bodies. "Devil" is a very inappropriate name borrowed from the Christians, who have very mistaken ideas on these subjects. Goodness and power do not always go together, for power depends on knowledge, not on goodness. A being living in Bhuvarloka, can very easily interpose a film of subtle matter between a fire and a physical body, and so prevent the body from being burned.

Q.—Are there proofs of the existence of devils?

Ans.—That depends on what you mean by devils. There are very bad men on the other side of death, as on this side, and they sometimes do harm. There are living men, with super-normal powers, who use them for injury—black magicians and their disciples. And there are mischievous nature-spirits, and artificial elementals of harmful kinds, cruel thought-forms, etc. All these things have given rise to the idea of devils.

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MANIFESTATION.

Q.—What is the meaning of the term "creation" ?

Ans.—It is popularly used in modern days to mean making something out of nothing, an impossible feat. "The unreal hath no being ; the real never ceaseth to be," says Shrî Kṛshṇa (*Bhag. Gîtâ.* ii. 16). This idea of creation arose in an unphilosophic age among ignorant people. In the older days that which is now called creation was regarded as re-arrangement—the re-arrangement of existing matter into fresh shapes, and such terms as the Heavenly Builder, the Great Architect, the Fashioner, the Artificer, the Worker, were used. Emanation was taught, not creation. In ordinary talk, the word is still used with this sense of shaping anew what exists ; we say an artist "creates" a picture or a statue, meaning that he gives new form to material already existing, not that he produces them out of nothing.

Q.—How has this world come into existence, according to the Hindû Religion ? What books teach anything on this ?

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Ans.—By the thought of Brahmâ, the active, or râjasic, aspect of Deity; he is therefore spoken of as the Creator, though perhaps Emanator would be a better word. You may read an account in the *Vishṇu Purâṇa*, and in other Purâṇas. You will also find a clear and simple description in the *Advanced* and *Elementary Text-Books*, Sanâtana Dharma Series, issued by the Central Hindû College.

Q.—What is the object of God in creating the universe?

Ans.—Many answers have been given to this question; some say with a Muslim writer; "I was a hidden treasure, and desired to be made manifest;" some say that Love desired to be loved; some that Love desired to have numberless beings who should ultimately share its own bliss. The final answer seems to be that in the Universal, the All, all universes, everything that was, is, and can be, exist eternally—"the unreal hath no being, the real never ceaseth to be" (*Bhagavad-Gîtâ*. ii, 16), and, in time and space, one or another appears and then disappears. "God" is the manifested, the Saguṇa Brahman, or the Îshvara, the Lord of a universe, and He gives objective existence, in time and space, to part of that which ever is, in eternity. *His* reason for doing so is probably very complex, and may be regarded as the root of, and as includ-

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ing, all the reasons which move man, in his small way, to create—delight in activity, beneficence, the reasons given above, etc. etc.

Q.—What is the object of creation ?

Ans.—It is a manifestation of Divine Life, the natural expression of a phase of the Divine Nature. The question has been answered in many ways. Some say, the love of God, willing to bring to self-consciousness many beings to share His bliss and love. Some Christians say, to show forth His glory. Some Sufîs say : He "was a hidden treasure and desired to become manifest". The Upaniṣhaṭ says : "He willed : I will multiply." What is clear is that the object of man being here is to unfold his capacities and to reflect the Divine perfection.

Q.—What is Pralaya ? Do Christians, Muhammaḍans, Buḍḍhists, Philosophers, and Veḍântins believe in Mahâpralaya ?

Ans.—Pralaya is the period during which activity ceases in a given area—the area over which the pralaya extends. Christians and Muhammaḍans, who hold the view of an everlasting heaven and hell after this earth is destroyed, cannot believe in pralaya, but the more philosophic among them, who regard heaven and hell as temporary, may believe in it. Buḍḍhists believe as do Hin-

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ḍûs. Vedânṭins are Hinḍûs. No one can say what philosophers believe, as they vary too, much, and have no special beliefs as a class.

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THE CONSTITUTION OF MAN.

Q.—In the Hindû Shâstras it is said that the Jîvâṭmâ is immortal and without beginning; in Birth and Evolution of the Soul *a soul is said to be born. Please explain the discrepancy.*

Ans.—The Jîvâṭmâ is the Self and is best translated Spirit; that is unborn and undying, eternal. The "soul" is the temporary manifestation of this, in comparatively dense matter, and the manifestation has a beginning and ending—that is, the vehicles of matter, which make a temporary manifestation possible, are born and die. A "soulless man" is a shell of matter, cast away by the soul.

Q.—When a man says: "I desire, I think, I act," who is the "I"? Is it Jîvâṭmâ, or the three bodies?

Ans.—There is only one consciousness, the Jîvâṭmâ, whose nature is Jñânam, Ichchhâ and Kriyâ. This one consciousness works in the three bodies, and is the "I" in all of them. The bodies, as such, cannot desire, think, or act, but they limit the power of consciousness in exercising its

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three functions, while at the same time enabling it to show out its inherent attributes.

Q.—What is Buḍḍhi? how can it be made firm?

Ans.—Buḍḍhi is the highest division of the intelligence, often called the Pure Reason (see answer on Chiṭ). It is the faculty whereby we recognise unity amid all diversity, the Self amid the forms. It cannot directly be "made firm," but, as knowledge and devotion increase, its powers can be better exercised, and it grows and becomes more and more effectively the vehicle of the Self.

Q.—What is the essential difference between Manaḥ and Chiṭ?

Ans.—The Jîvâṭmâ shews three aspects of consciousness: Will, Wisdom, Activity, or Ichchhâ, Jñânam, Kriyâ. The attributes, or nature, of these are Ânanda, Chiṭ, Saṭ. Chiṭ is thus the cognitive aspect of the Jîvâṭmâ. Chiṭ is divided into four: Buddhi, Manaḥ, Chiṭṭa, Ahamkâra. This multiplication is due to the interplay upon Chiṭ of itself and the remaining two attributes, Ânanḍa and Sat, or Ichchhâ and Kriyâ, reproducing in it the original triplicity. Buḍḍhi is the effect of Chiṭ upon Chiṭ, *i. e.* pure cognition and definite assertion; Manaḥ of Ichchhâ upon Chiṭ, making it attract and repel: "I wish to think," "I do not

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like to think ;" Chitta of Kriyâ upon Chit, thought directed to action : " I think I will do " ; these three are synthesised into Ahamkâra, the unifying, the central, "I" consciousness, or Chit as self-consciousness. These ideas are only suitable for the study of the elder students among our readers. The ordinary interpretation, which may be seen to be a partial statement of the above, is that Buddhi determines or discriminates, is " characterised by certitude ;" Manah (sankalpa and vikalpa) is " characterised by resolution and irresolution ;" Chitta sensates ; Ahamkâra is egoism, the sense of being " I " ; the four make up the Antahkarana or inner organ.

Q.—In which of the four divisions of the body—head, trunk, thighs and feet—is the aura placed ?

Ans.—The aura surrounds the whole body like a great egg, and is not at any one particular part more than at another. It permeates every part of the body and extends outside it, looking like a cloud, in the middle of which the dense body is seen.

Q.—What is the function of the pineal gland ?

Ans.—From the standard of ordinary western science it is a vestigial organ, the relic of a past central eye in non-human forms. From the standpoint of occult science, it is also " the third eye " from the past, but in addition to that, occult

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science regards it as capable of again evolving into an organ of higher vision, and as a connecting link between the mental body and the physical brain, as the pituitary body is a link between the astral body and the physical brain. The pineal gland is not, so far as I know, functioning in any vertebrate at the present time, except in men who have artificially hastened their evolution by Yoga. Concentration helps to bring the pineal gland into activity.

Q.—What part does the navel play in adult human beings, especially in the male sex? Does it really form the seat of "Idâ" "Piṅgalâ" and Sushumnâ," the Nâḍîs of the Vedântists; and if so, are they synonymous with the nervous system (cranial and spinal) of the physiologists?

Ans.—The navel is simply the scar left by the cutting of the umbilical cord, and has no function. But the word is used to denote a real centre; psycho-physiologically, it stands for the solar plexus; in Yoga, it represents the origin of the three nâḍîs mentioned. The question is not a suitable one to answer further here.

Q.—Is there any difference from the spiritual stand-point between the souls of man and woman?

Ans.—A simple "yes" or "no" cannot be given to this question. The Jîva itself is sexless; but in manifestation along one line in evolution,

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Jîvas do consistently develop one side of their nature, and thus become predominately masculine or feminine during that cycle of manifestation, becoming Ḍevas and Ḍevîs. Along another, the Jîvas develop both sides of their nature, taking birth sometimes in a male body, sometimes in a female, becoming a balanced and fully rounded being, when the cycle of births is over and liberation attained, becoming a Ṛshi.

Q.—Has every one of us to pass through the different stages of evolution we see around us?

Ans.—Yes. The incidents need not be precisely the same; but they will be similar. As we evolve, we become able to profit more and more by the experience of others, and thus shorten our own.

Q.—Brahman is formless and a Jîva is said to be His image reflected in the Antaḥkaraṇa. How can a formless object have an image?

Ans.—The Jîva is formless in the sense that Brahman is formless. But when identical qualities are possessed, then the subordinate is called, by a figure of speech, the image of the superior. Thus Brahman is said to be Sat, Chit, Ânanda; Kriyâ, Jñânam, Ichchhâ in the Jîva are the reflexions of these, and so the Jîva is called the image of Brahman.

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Q.—Vedântins do not agree with the idea that Jîvas have unfolded their powers through the lower kingdoms up to man, and that the present lower kingdoms are animated by younger Jîvas. Is there any authority in the Shâstras for the view objected to?

Ans.—The general idea is expounded in the *Aitareya Brâhmaṇa*, in the passage you will find in the *Advanced Text-Book*, pp. 80-82. Here the progressive unfolding of the three aspects of the Jîva is very clearly stated, and note Sayana's commentary: "The Âtmâ has not yet attained to the form of Jîva," and his "stages of manifestation in a higher degree". The successive degrees of manifestation form what modern science calls evolution.

Q.—Sometimes in the Shâstras the Jîva is said to be free, sometimes to be bound. If he be the latter, it would seem to be cruel that he should suffer the consequences of actions that he cannot help.

Ans.—Students would find more satisfactory answers to these constantly recurring questions, if they would try to grasp a few simple principles and apply them to solve details, instead of taking up separate details without any idea of underlying principles. The Jîva is a "portion of Myself, a living being"; that is the first thing to grasp. Next: this Jîva, on the âtmic plane is free and omniscient, but he wills to live also on other

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planes, to see, hear, taste, etc. on denser planes of being; the exercise of powers gives pleasure and he wills to experience this. Thirdly: when he thus plunges into denser matter, his powers cannot assert themselves, and he is as a seed, a germ, of divine life, enveloped in avidyâ; he becomes bound from outside. Fourthly: slowly he learns to shape the matter, so that he can express himself through it, and his efforts at first are mere blind pushings and gropings. Many of these pushings are in directions that bring him pleasure, many in directions that bring him pain. Fifthly: he *desires* pleasure: he *thinks* how to obtain it; he *acts* according to his thought. Thus he makes fetters for his future; for he must go to the place where his desires can be gratified; he must work in the mental body his thoughts have formed; he must be surrounded by the circumstances his acts have created; thus he becomes bound from within. Sixthly: but, amid all these outward and inward bindings, he himself remains the free Divinity; he can will; the carrying out of the will is hampered by the outer bonds which he has voluntarily assumed for the sake of experiencing the phenomena of the denser planes, and by the inner bonds that in his struggles with the denser matter he has forged. Think all this out, and you will begin to understand.

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Q.—Our Lord Shrî Kṛshṇa says to Arjuna of the soul, नयाय हन्ति न हन्यते. *Please explain. Does not a sin committed in the material vesture soil the spiritual essence?*

Ans.— The Jîva, the separated self, dwelling in the body, is not injured when the body is killed, its life is independent of the material vesture with which it is clothed, and it is no more slain when the body is destroyed than a man is killed when his coat is torn in two.

A sin committed does not stain the Jîva:

यथा सर्वगतं सौक्ष्म्यादाकाशं नोपलिप्यते ।
सर्वत्रावस्थितो देहे तथात्मा नोपलिप्यते ॥

(Bh. Gîtâ xiv. 33*)*

"As the omnipresent ākāsha is not affected by reason of its subtlety, so, seated everywhere in the body, the Self is not affected."

But as the Jîva enjoys the objects of the senses by means of the senses, so also it suffers by means of the senses—the material vesture generally—and when a sin is wrought in consequence of ignorance, in and through and by the body, the Jîva suffers in and by and through the body the sorrowful results of the sin.

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Q. Has mind speed? If so, how can we prove it?

Ans. All thoughts are accompanied with vibrations of matter, and the propagation of these vibrations is very rapid. In this sense, mind may be said to have speed, but speed belongs to the matter side of nature, and cannot be predicated of consciousness as such. The practically instantaneous transmission of a thought has been proved by many experiments in telepathy; you will find a number of these recorded in F. W. Myers' *Human Personality.*

Q. How can I drive away all kinds of interrupting thoughts from my mind when I am performing my Sandhyâ?

Ans. There is no way except "constant practice and dispassion," as Shrî Krishna said. The mind is very difficult to control, but if you try every day to pay attention to each thing that you do, while you are doing it, you will find your mind become gradually steadier, and intruding thoughts will be less troublesome. Complete steadiness of

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mind is an exceedingly high attainment, and you cannot expect to achieve it quickly.

Q. How can we check idle and useless thoughts?

Ans. By having a useful thought in the mind to which we direct our attention when the other thoughts intrude. It is a good thing to learn a holy shloka in the morning, and when foolish or evil thoughts come into the mind, to begin saying it over.

Q. What is the best method of avoiding evil thoughts which trouble the mind?

Ans. To keep the mind supplied with good thoughts. The mind can only occupy itself with one thing at a time; the good thought chosen should be the opposite of the evil thought which continually intrudes; some shloka, or shlokas, should be chosen which embody the good thought, and when the evil thought comes into the mind, the mind should instantly begin repeating the chosen passage, and either repeat it many times, or repeat it once and then dwell upon it. At odd times during the day, when the mind is unoccupied, the shloka should be repeated. In this way the evil thought will gradually cease to trouble, the mental atmosphere created being unfavorable to its reception.

Q. How can a student concentrate his mind on

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one thing when he has to think of many subjects, literary, scientific, etc.

Ans. He does not need to think always on one subject, but to fix his mind steadily on the subject to which for the time it is directed. In his morning worship he should concentrate his thoughts on God, but during the day he should attend thoroughly to whatever he is doing, and so obtain the habit of thinking steadily. A well-trained mind can be turned to any subject at will, for as long as the owner wishes.

Q. How can I cure my absent-mindedness ?

Ans. Only very gradually, I fear. Pay attention to each thing that you do, however trivial, and if the mind wanders away, bring it back the moment you are conscious of the wandering. Persevering effort will bring you success in time.

Q. Has God given the same power of memory to one and all ?

Ans. All have the same possibilities of memory, but some people have evolved them into actualities much more than others have done. If you want to have a good memory in your next birth, you must strengthen it now by paying attention to the thing you are doing at the time.

Q. Please tell me a method of developing will-

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power, and recommend me any book on the subject?

Ans. Make a definite rule about some particular point of daily conduct, and carry it out. For instance: decide that you will rise at such and such an hour, and when the hour comes jump straight out of bed. Or, decide to read at such and such an hour, and do it every day. Or, decide to abstain from a certain article of food for a week or a month, and abstain. These are ways of developing the will, and you can invent many other similar exercises. (See *A Study in Consciousness*, Section on Will, by Annie Besant.)

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Sleep and Dreams.

Q. Is it necessary that we should sleep with our heads to the east or the west?

Ans. Not in the least; as a matter of fact, most Hinḍûs sleep with their heads to the south, by preference. If you find that you remain awake when your head points in any particular direction, then you should change it.

Q. What is the best direction for the head to be in while sleeping? European Scientists agree in saying that the North is the best. The opinion of all Hinḍûs, supported by a popular shloka, is the exact opposite. How can you reconcile these?

Ans. I cannot reconcile them, obviously. But who are the "European Scientists" who have given any opinion on the matter? As a rule, Europeans pay no attention to this matter, and sleep with the head in any direction. Most people who are sensitive to magnetic currents find the south the best position. Ascetics and Yogîs prefer the north. A person can very easily experiment, and find out what direction suits him best.

Q. Theosophists have written that death is mere-

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ly a sleep, but sick men know when they are going to sleep and when they are going to die.

Ans. I do not think any Theosophist has written that "death is merely a sleep". Death and sleep have much in common; in both, the man leaves his physical body; but in sleep the *whole* physical body is left behind (annamaya and prâṇamaya koshas), whereas, in death, the etheric portion is torn away from the dense part, and accompanies the higher bodies for a brief time. Hence the life-currents no longer circulate in the physical body, while in sleep their circulation continues.

Q. (*a*). *What is the cause of speaking during sleep?*

(*b*). *How is it that some speak during sleep every night?*

(*c*). *Is there any remedy to prevent speaking during sleep?*

(*a*). *If there is, what is it?*

Ans. These questions (*a* and *b*) cannot be satisfactorily answered in the present state of extant knowledge on the subject. Modern scientists have practically only just begun to turn attention to the physiology and pathology of sleep. (See "Science Jottings," *C. H. C. Magazine*, October, 1906, page 259.)

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But, generally, whatever is the cause of speaking during the waking condition would apparently also be the cause of it during sleep—in a minor degree. That is to say, when a person's mind is very full of any subject and he is eager to speak about it to others, and his body and vocal apparatus are not disabled, he speaks about that subject. In ordinary persons, the vocal apparatus is "disabled" if the body is thoroughly tired out with the day's work and sleeps soundly. In others, in whom this is not the case, and the body is only very lightly asleep, the vocal apparatus may work then as it does in the waking condition. In other persons other organs also work, as in sleep-walking, etc. The vedântic explanation of sleep is that the consciousness of the Jîva is withdrawn from all other parts of the body and retires into one special nerve, or cell, or whatever it be called (the purîtat-tanâdî). As the retraction of the consciousness into this spot is weak and incomplete, so will the body's sleep remain weak and incomplete, and actions appear in it similar to those of the waking condition.

(*c* and *d*) If the above explanation be correct, then it follows that any mental and physical studies and exercises that will thoroughly and healthily tire out brain and body and promote sound sleep will counteract sleep talking, sleep-walking, etc. Special

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cases of physical or super-physical disease would have to be dealt with specially, by physicians or Occultists. (Bh. D.)

Q. What is dream ? Why does a man dream ?

Ans. "Dream" covers a large number of different psychic experiences. Sometimes a little extra pressure in a vessel of the brain will set up a series of disjointed pictures, broken memories of events that have happened here. Sometimes a real experience on the astral plane is remembered and called a dream. Anything that happens to a man out of his body, and is remembered on waking is a dream. (See *Dreams*, by C. W. Leadbeater.)

Q. How can a boy avoid bad dreams at night ?

Ans. By not allowing any evil thoughts to remain in the mind during waking hours. This will not at once prevent the occurrence of bad dreams, but gradually they will cease to trouble. The brain often repeats at night the thoughts it has sent forth during the day, and habitual evil thinking is one of the causes of evil dreams. But even when the waking thoughts are guarded, some traces of past evil thoughts may remain in the matter of the Sûkṣhma Sharîra, and these traces may be revived by the play upon them of the evil thoughts of others, and thus trouble one whose present waking thoughts are pure. Let the boy persist in pure thinking,

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and these traces of the past will disappear and the bad dreams with them.

Q. Do dreams prognosticate ?

Ans. When a man is asleep, the Jîvâṭmâ has put off the Sṭhûla Sharîra for the time, and is living in Bhuvarloka in his Sûkṣhma Sharîra. This subtle body hinders his powers of perception much less than does the gross body, so that he can see through it better than he can through the thicker one, just as you can see better through a thin piece of muslin than through a thick piece of cloth. Hence he can sometimes see a little ahead of things taking place in the physical world, and if he is able to impress what he has seen on his physical brain, when he comes back to his lower body, we have what is called a prophetic dream.

Q. A correspondent says he has often dreamed about flying, and wonders why this should be, since a bird cannot become a human being without taking birth in the intermediate stage of a quadruped, in order to become possessed of four limbs.

Ans. This dream-flying is a very common experience, which many of our readers must have had. It arises from a dim and confused remembrance of moving in the Sûkṣhma Ṣharîra, the subtle body—of which the astral body of the Theosophist is the coarser part; this movement being performed

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without any action of the limbs, or any conscious effort beyond the mere wish to move, or to be somewhere, gives to the earth-dweller the feeling of the free sweep of the bird in the air. In sleep, everyone is in his Sûkṣhma Sharîra, and a memory of his feelings or actions therein is one form of dream. Our correspondent is in error in his statements about birds and beasts. The bird is a four-limbed creature, having two legs and two wings. Monads do not appear to pass through the bird-stage on the way to the beast-stage, the bird being an offshoot from an early division of the reptile stage; some of the gigantic Saurians were bird-like creatures, and the winged dragons of old legends are the traditional memories of the mighty winged lizards of far-off days. The evolution of birds is so far not well understood among Theosophists; they are on the line to some non-human kingdom.

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THE CASTE SYSTEM.

Q. Is the Caste System essential?

Ans. The fact recognised by the caste system is universal; this fact is: that there are four great stages in the road of evolution, and every Jîvâtmâ must pass through each of these. The caste system is a local and temporary arrangement of society in accordance with the natural order. If, at any time, the outer system and the natural fact are in accord, the caste system works well. When they are in disaccord, trouble results.

Q. What are the duties of a Brâhmaṇa?

Ans. Read what Bhîṣhma says on this in the Shânṭi Parva of the *Mahâbhâraṭa*, and see what is called the Brâhmaṇa Karma in the *Bhagavaḍ-Gîṭâ*, xviii. 42.

Q. Do Brâhmaṇas commit sin in teaching the lower classes?

Ans. Certainly not; on the contrary, the neglect of such teaching has been a sin from which India has suffered grievously, and which has much aided the spread of Christianity. Religious and moral teaching, suitable to the needs of the undeveloped,

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should have been given. The only teachings forbidden are those which would be useless or dangerous to the undeveloped; but to make the withholding of these a reason for withholding all knowledge is a fault for which a heavy kârmic penalty is now being exacted.

Q. No other castes than the Brâhmaṇas can read the Veḍas, according to our laws. What is the reason?

Ans. You are mistaken: the three twice-born castes, Brâhmaṇas, Kṣhaṭṭriyas, and Vaishyas, are all bound to study the Veḍas. Only the Brâhmaṇas are authorised to *teach* them. In all societies, different duties are assigned to different classes: soldiers and merchants are not teachers.

Q. Is this statement true: That modern Brâhmaṇas are not real Brâhmaṇas?

Ans. Try to understand and clearly define in your own mind what a real Brâhmaṇa ought to be, and then you will be able to find out for yourself the answer to your question. Read the *Vâsishtha Smṛti* for what a real Brâhmaṇa is.

Q. Does a Brâhmaṇa cease to be a Brâhmaṇa if he uses the phrase, "Your most obedient servant," to an inferior?

Ans. The phrase is a foolish one, and in strict-

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ness should not be used except by an inferior to one much his superior. It is one of the social falsehoods for the most part. But we can hardly say that its use should entail exclusion from caste, any more than the countless small falsehoods of daily life. The punishment would be quite disproportionate.

Q. What is the difference between a Brâhmaṇa and a Shûdra? Every man is a part of the Supreme Being, so there is no difference between the different classes of men. Why should not Shûdras study the Veḍas, etc.?

Ans. The physical difference is the line of ancestry. Brâhmaṇas are supposed to have maintained purity of diet and of intermarriage for many generations. The difference is like that between a man of good family and one of obscure family. For some generations now many Brâhmaṇas have neglected their rules and so their physical purity has become impaired. Superphysically, the type of the Sûkṣhma Sharîra is different. Your argument goes too far: Every stone is part of the Supreme Being; so there is no difference between a stone and a man. Clearly something is wrong in such an inference. The inner life in stone, plant, animal, man, is one and the same; the difference lies in the material coats, some of which are more highly evolved than others. The material coats of the

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Brâhmaṇa should be much more highly evolved than those of the Shûḍra, and where the lines have been kept fairly pure the difference in the physical body is very obvious. In the Kṛṭa Yuga, the *Mahâbhârata* says that the four castes "used one mantra, one mode and one ritual". If the Shûḍras give up all impure food and lead noble and intellectual lives, as some already do—this would return.

Q. Which is the better, a Pariah with spiritual development, or a Brâhmaṇa who knows the Veḍas and does his daily karmas?

Ans. Obviously this is an impossible question to answer, save in specific cases. If the Brâhmaṇa is supposed to be a mere lip-ritualist, then a spiritually developed Pariah would be his superior.

Q. According to the Hinḍû Shâsṭras there are only four Varṇas. Were the Mlechchhas of the time included in these?

Ans. No: the Mlechchha of the time was a barbarian, entirely outside the Hinḍû polity. Sometimes a whole tribe of such barbarians would be taken into the Hinḍû community; a fighting tribe, for instance, would be admitted into the Kṣhaṭṭriya caste.

Q. Why cannot a Shûḍra wear the sacred thread, or do Ṭapas?

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Ans. The sacred thread is a symbol of certain qualities the wearer is supposed to possess; it symbolises the triple control of thought, speech and actions, for instance. Now the Shûdra caste was intended only for young souls, who had not as yet acquired self-control, but were controlled by others, were "under obedience". Hence the Shûdra did not wear the symbol of self-control. Similarly with the Ṭapas; the true Shûdra has neither the capacity nor the wish to do it. There is so much confusion of castes now that the outer and the inner no longer coincide.

Q. *Can Shûdras read the Vedas and Upanishats and other religious books?*

Ans. The restrictions suited to a past condition of things are no longer suitable to the changed conditions of the present. If Brâhmaṇas take up professions closed to them by the ancient law, they cannot consistently invoke that same law to exclude Shûdras from the reading of the Vedas. If that law is to be enforced, it is obvious that the highest caste should set the example of obedience.

Q. Are intermarriage and interdining among the various castes desirable?

Ans. They are forbidden by the Shâstras, and when the castes were pure and real, the restrictions worked for the general good and happiness. Now

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that the castes do not fulfil their Ḍharmas, the restrictions are of little real use.

Q. Is eating food cooked by a non-Hindû objectionable and prohibited? If so, why?

Ans. Food should be cooked by a person who is mentally and physically clean. This has been sought to be ensured by having food cooked by the ladies of the family, or, in their default, by a Brâhmaṇa. This being the custom, it is a mistake to go against it without good reason, especially as the custom is a generally wholesome one. If you go abroad, you must take your food from non-Hinḍûs, unless you are rich enough to travel with a cook.

Q. Why is interdining objected to among Hinḍûs?

Ans. Originally for the sake of protecting the magnetic purity of the Sûkṣhma Sharîra. Now it has become a convention, without reality. Men eat with very impure persons, if they are of the same castes, and refuse to eat with those who are pure, if they are of different castes. Hence the object of restriction has vanished.

Q. Is it stated in the Vaiṣhṇava religion that a Vaiṣhṇava should not dine or take water in a Smârta's house?

Ans. I should hope not. This is a petty secta-

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rian idea, which good Hinḍûs should discourage.

Q. Agrawâlâs take a certain kind of food (i. e. kachchâ, like dâl, rôti, etc.) only from Gauḍa Brâhmaṇas; what is the origin of this?

Ans. A complete reply would be possible only if we could have a complete history of the gradual growth of the Hinḍû customs now current. This is not available. We can therefore make only surmises, more or less correct.

(*a*) In the old books, Smṛtîs and Purâṇas, there are clear indications that all four castes could take all sorts of edibles from the hands of each other in the olden time. The "out-castes," "the fifth caste," etc. were aspṛshya, untouchable, to the other four, and so, naturally, was food touched by them.

(*b*) With changes in the general condition of the Hinḍû people, mostly political, when many Kings and governments and constant wars and disturbances arose, people seem to have begun to be thrown into many groups, somewhat like nomad tribes, each very strongly knit together within its own limits, and very suspicious and exclusive of all outside those limits. Then probably, each such group (generally definable by a land area)

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had its own tribes of each of the four castes, who clung to each other closely. The clinging together would be more observable among the less martial but well-to-do classes, who like settled homes. Such would be Brâhmaṇas and Vaishyas of various sub-castes.

This would be one cause of the gradual growth of such conventions as we now observe; *e. g.* Agrawâlâ Vaishyas and Gauḍa Brâhmaṇas, both vegetarians and both occupying largely the country round about Delhi, go together and, it should be particularly noted, take both kachchâ as well as pakkâ food from each other's hands. So Khaṭṭris and Sârasvaṭas, both non-vegetarians and both occupying the Panjâb, go together and take both kinds of food from each other; and so on.

To some such general cause, there may have been added, later on, in the time of comparative anarchy, others, *viz.*, constant mutual fear and need of self-defence in any and every way. These would give rise to further precautions against poisoning, or to steps to make oneself appear extra holy and respectable and "to be feared" superphysically; conceit must have helped also. And so we have an excessive avoidance of touch and the imitation in daily household life of excessively "holy" practices which suit only Yogîs and San-

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nyâsîs. We understand there are some sub-castes of Shûdras who do not take food cooked by Brâhmaṇas, as a matter of reciprocity. (Bh. D.)

Q. What is the influence of, and is there any necessity for wearing, caste-marks?

Ans. You probably mean sect marks, as there are no such things as caste-marks. The marks worn on the forehead do not show a man's caste, but only the religious school to which he belongs—whether he be a Shaiva or a Vaiṣhṇava, for instance. A ṭilak is made on the forehead during Pûjâ, a symbol of the "divine eye" opened in meditation. This has grown into the practice of marking the fact by an elaborated ṭilak. The central ṭilak, when made of magnetised sandal, or the streak of magnetised ashes, stimulates the chakram related to the forehead. The other marks can be worn, or not, according to individual taste, and have no special value. A man wears a mark as a Vaiṣhṇava or a Shaiva, etc., not as a Brâhmaṇa or a Kṣhaṭṭriya, a Vaishya or a Shûdra. There is no great use in them, and while exceedingly common in Southern India they are comparatively rare in Northern. They are worn as marks of devotion, just as you see many Christians wear a cross hanging from a chain round the neck, or on the watch-chain. Outer symbols are very helpful to many people, those of the poetic, or artistic, or devotional type;

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they are disliked by the prosaic, or the unemotional, or the reserved. There is no possible reason why those who like them should not use them, why those who dislike them should not leave them unused; and why both should not be sufficiently tolerant to abstain from unkind criticism the one of the other.

Q. Why should there be periods of varying lengths in different castes regarded as periods of ashaucha after a death in the family, and why should people bathe at the end of such a period?

Ans. The various stages of the life after death are conditioned by the nature of the life just closed. A man born into the Brâhmaṇa caste was supposed to lead a very spiritual life; hence his stay in the lowest stage of Kâmaloka was very brief, and the period of ashaucha for his family, which lasted while he was in that stage, was very brief. Each lower caste had a longer stage, as the life led was supposed to be less spiritual. With the loss of caste-Ḍharma and the consequent confusion of castes, these periods have become formal, and no longer represent facts on the other side. People bathe at the close of the ashaucha period to get rid of the polluting magnetism of the after-death conditions, and also as a symbol of purification.

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THE SACRED THREAD.

Q. What is the use of wearing the sacred thread?

Ans. It is a distinguishing mark of the "twice-born," and shews that a man has been duly initiated into his caste-life and can take part in its rites and ceremonies. The giving of the thread marks the passage from infancy to boyhood, and the beginning of the educational life. It is an ancient and beautiful ceremony, and the thread should ever remind the wearer of his privileges as an Âryan, of the triple control required of him over mind, desire and action, of the obligation that lies upon him to live up to the noble religion to which he belongs.

Q. Why is not the thread-ceremony performed for girls, and why are they forbidden to use vaidik mantras?

Ans. In ancient times the sacred thread was worn by women as well as men, and there is no good reason why it should now be used by men only. Some of the vaidik mantras were written by women, and the shutting out of women from their

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use is, once more, a departure from ancient custom.

Q. Why do Brâhmaṇas wear the sacred thread? Why is it of three threads not of four? Why do not women wear it? Among the Pârsîs women do wear it.

Ans. It is worn by the three 'twice-born' castes, and is a sign of the self-control that they should exercise; it is given when they are admitted to certain privileges, as a sign that they may rightly exercise them. The three threads symbolise the triple control to be exercised over thought, speech and action, and also remind us of all the triplets in the universe—the fundamental fact of the triple constitution of everything, the three attributes of consciousness, the three attributes of matter, etc., etc. Most Hindû women are married, and the wife is one with her husband, inseparable from him, and his thread represents their common status. In the older time, Brahmavâḍinîs wore the thread, but, with their disappearance as a recognised order of women, the custom that women should wear the thread naturally vanished; it seems somewhat doubtful whether it was ever habitually worn by married women. There seems to be no reason why women should not wear it, though modern custom is mostly against it.

Q. Why do the Brâhmaṇas wear the sacred

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thread? Why is it triple, three-fold? and would not ordinary thread do for it?

Ans. The sacred thread marks, in the three twice-born castes, the entry into the Brahmacharya Âshrama. Thus regarded, it is like any other sign of a particular state. In exoteric religion it shows that the earlier Samskaras have been performed, and is the warrant for the admission of the wearer to the later ones. Morally it is the sign of self-control, and the triple thread refers, among other things, to the control of thought, speech and action. It is better to use the thread sold for the purpose, as ordinary thread may be made of very dirty materials.

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MARRIAGE.

Q. Is not marriage a hindrance in religious matters for a man?

Ans. No; it is often a means of progress, by the tenderness, patience and unselfishness it teaches. For some forms of Yoga, celibacy is necessary.

Q. Why does Hinduism allow marriage for Occultists?

Ans. Marriage is not a hindrance to spiritual progress or to the gaining of occult knowledge; but it is incompatible with some special forms of Yoga, and men and women who want to practise those must become celibate.

Q. If a man is disgusted with worldly things and does not wish to marry, what should he do if his guardians press him to do so?

Ans.—A 'man' would not have guardians, so the question must apply to a boy. It is very very rare to find in a boy a real and settled disgust with worldly things. But if he feels it for some years, he might beg his guardians not to insist on marrying him, but to let him wait till he is older.

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If the guardians insist, then he should yield to their wish, understanding that such marriage is his karma, as it comes to him through those whom he is bound to obey.

Q. Martin Luther says that to forbid marriage is against God's command. Are then Brahmachârîs displeasing to God?

Ans. Brahmachârîs are not forbidden to marry by any one; they have themselves chosen a celibate life, and even Martin Luther would hardly say that a man may not live celibate if he chooses to do so. "To forbid marriage" would be wrong, but Jesus Himself praises those who live celibate "for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake". Martin Luther was very one-sided and hot-headed. Why do you speak of the "holy words of our great Reformer"? He was a very brave man, but not a man whose words are particularly "holy," and by no means an authority of a high order intellectually or morally. And why "our" Reformer? He was a German, who founded a large Christian community.

Q. Is early marriage a good custom?

Ans. Is not this rather a foolish question to send to the *Hindû College Magazine*, since the College Board excludes married boys from the School? Boy marriage is a great social evil; it

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weakens the race, injures the girl-mothers, and causes premature old age. Brahmacharya was insisted on during the whole of student life by ancient law, and the sooner this wholesome custom is revived, the better it will be for India.

Q. Why should we object to early marriage, while our Lord Shrî Râmachandra Himself was married at an early age, and we take Him as our ideal?

Ans. Shrî Râmachandra is said to have been about 16 when Vishvâmitra took Him away to defend his sacrifice. He had finished His education—so the Brahmacharya stage was over—and He was a warrior, strong enough to fight powerful enemies. It was not until He had thus proved Himself a powerful warrior, that he went on to Mithalâ and was married. He was not a child of eleven or even much younger, as are many bridegrooms now. Moreover, He did not become a father—the most important point—till He was a man of mature age.

Q. Why should not a widow re-marry, if a widower may do so?

Ans. It is the nobler path if neither re-marries, but accepts the death of the life-partner as a call to a life of more general service. There is more excuse for the re-marriage of the widower, where

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he has little children left motherless and helpless, for he cannot supply their wants, and if no near relative be available, he is almost forced to re-marry for their sake. The mother, on the other hand, left widowed, finds her natural solace and occupation in the care of her children, and would be less useful to them if she marries again, and has to attend to the demands of another husband and a new family. On the re-marriage of virgin widows, I have written at length and need not repeat. No child of 9 or 10 ought to be married, whether widow or single. The question of widow marriage was very fully discussed in the *C. H. C. Magazine* some time ago.

Q. Was polyandry allowed by the Vedas? If not, what is the meaning of the verse addressed to Ashvins, in which a damsel "acknowledges your husbandship, saying you are my lords"?

Ans. Polyandry and polygamy both existed in vaidik times, and there is nothing to be surprised at in references to either. Under some conditions, the one or the other may be necessary for national life. People know little of history if they suppose that monogamy has always been regarded as the only respectable form of marriage. But the above passage has nothing to do with polyandry in human society. The Ashvinas are not human beings.

Q. Is not Niyoga one of the greatest blots on

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Indo-Âryan civilisation ? Is it not a crime ? What is its ethical end ?

Ans. It was a recognised custom in most, if not all, ancient nations, in order to preserve property in the line of descent. It would now be regarded as a crime. The end was social, not ethical, like primogeniture, or any other law regulating the succession to property. Why should you expect the conventions of the present to be universal in space and time ?

Q. How was it that Shrî Kṛshṇa had several wives ?

Ans. Marriage customs differ largely in different ages, and in ancient times polygamy was common, especially among chieftains. The custom has endured down to the present day, notably in the class of wealthy rulers. When Shrî Kṛshṇa was incarnate, most princes had more than one wife, and He followed the custom of His age and race. It was not and is not sinful, though undesirable in modern days, and in ancient days it was followed by many great Ṛshis and Saints. In the case of Shrî Kṛshṇa, of course, extraordinary good karma was behind each woman who entered into such a relation with the manifestation of the Supreme Lord. It was the reward of superhuman merit.

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Q. Why does Hinḍûism allow polyandry—as in the case of Draupaḍî, animal sacrifices, and marriage for Occultists?

Ans. All ancient religions sanction polygamy, because in ancient times it was necessary for the safety, stability and rapid growth of society. There being more women than men, and their persons not being safe unless under male protection, several were married to one man. Irregular connexions, which make society very unstable, were thus largely prevented, and there was no class of immoral women, selling themselves for bread, such as is found now in most civilised countries. Until men learn self-control and fidelity to one woman, there will continue to be either polygamy or prostitution. The East has generally preferred polygamy; the West prostitution. Both show—except under the conditions stated above—a low state of sexual morality. A Hinḍû boy should not be distressed when a missionary attacks him about polygamy, for in the Christian Bible Abraham, the "friend of God," had several wives, and so had David, the "man after God's own heart". In early societies, for the reasons above given, polygamy was sanctioned by religious teachers, and holy men practised it as well as permitted it. Abraham and David are not therefore to be blamed for it, but the missionary is to blame who, knowing that his own *Old Testament*

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Saints practised it, attacks a Hindû boy because his great men did the same. Monogamy is usual in Hindû society to-day, though we meet with exceptions; and there are certain sub-castes in which morality on this subject is exceedingly bad. Here reform should be worked for, but Hinduism should not be condemned for exceptions.

Hinduism does not allow polyandry. The case of Draupadî is peculiar, and her marriage to the Pandavas was strongly objected to by her father, as contrary to the recognised law, until it was explained to him that she had rendered it necessary by her doings in a previous life. Animal sacrifices are not justifiable now, and it is said that the only permissible sacrifice in the Kali Yuga is that of charity—gift. It is unfortunately true that some Hindûs do still kill animals in sacrifice, but it is no more justifiable than it would be for Christians to do so because it is commanded in their *Bible.* Marriage is not a hindrance to spiritual progress, or to the gaining of occult knowledge; but it is incompatible with some special forms of Yoga, and men and women who want to practise those must become celibates.

Q. Can a man marry four wives, one from each caste in these days?

Ans. Polygamy is now an evil and should not

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be indulged in, though in the early days of a nation, it has often been necessary for the national welfare. Those times are past; a man would be outcasted now-a-days if he married out of his caste, though such marriages were allowed in ancient times.

Q. Can a Brâhmaṇa marry a girl belonging to any of the four castes?

Ans. It would appear from the old books that he could in former times, but that practice has been made illegal by the later Smṛtis.

Q. Is it stated in the Vaiṣhṇava or Smârṭa religion that a Vaiṣhṇava boy should not marry a Smârṭa girl?

Ans. We are not sufficiently versed in the Vaiṣhṇava and Smârṭa lore to be able to give any useful reply on the subject. But, we are informed, Vaiṣhṇava and Smârṭa Brâhmaṇas do not intermarry, or even interdine, in Southern India. In upper India they are less exclusive and do so. Judging by common sense and general human experience if two persons hold, in a violent and extreme manner, beliefs which not only differ but disagree, then it would obviously be safer for them not to marry each other.

Q. Is the custom of marriage between persons of near kin advantageous?

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Ans. No, it is exceedingly bad. Intermarriage between relatives tends to nervous degeneration, and lowers vitality. Hence it has been prohibited by the great religions, and should be avoided by all who care for the health of their posterity.

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PÛJÂ.

Q. What is Pûjâ?

Ans. Pûjâ simply means worship or showing reverence, and is performed in various ways. You had better read the chapter on 'worship' in the *Elementary Text Book*. You will find there also information which will answer your question about man's 'creation'.

Q. What is meant by Pûja and Sandhyâ-vandana?

Ans. Pûjâ is worship—the offering of prayer to Îshvara or to a Ḍeva or Ḍevî; it is very often accompanied by offerings of flowers, sandal, etc., all signs of love and reverence. The essential part is the attitude of the mind, the looking up to a Being higher than ourselves with gratitude, trust and devotion. Sandhyâ is a special form of Pûjâ, and the name is given to it because it is performed in the morning and evening 'twilights'; it consists in the use of a definite sequence of prayers and mantras, accompanied with certain gestures and sprinklings. The two chief forms are

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the Vaidik and the Tântric; some use one, some the other.

Q. Is it absolutely necessary to perform Sandhyâ at sunrise and sunset, and wrong to perform it later?

Ans. The best time is the sunrise and sunset, because the magnetic condition of the earth is then the most favorable. Hence sensible people do it then. But there is nothing wrong in doing it earlier or later.

Q. Is a set form of prayer necessary, e. g., Sandhyâ? ought a Brâhmaṇa to pray thrice every day?

Ans. Necessary, no; but for most people a set form is a great help. Most average religious people use some such help, in all religions, and are very much the better for it. Under present conditions, few people are able to observe the mid-day prayer, and its place may be taken by a momentary withdrawal of the mind from outer things and resting it in the thought of the Supreme.

Q. Why do Brâhmaṇas perform Sandhyâ thrice daily?

Ans. This is not peculiar to Brâhmaṇas. Sandhyâ is performed by the other castes also. To worship, morning and evening, is a very natural and pious custom, and is good both for the indivi-

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dual and for all around him. People of all faiths worship daily, though the number of fixed times of prayer may vary.

Q. Can a non-Brâhmaṇa, say a Shûḍra, perform Sandhyâ as laid down in the Shâstras?

Ans. Non-Brâhmaṇas such as Kṣhaṭṭriyas and Vaishyas, can perform such Sandhyâ. No form, so far as I know, is laid down in any Shâstra for Shûḍras. That should not prevent them from using some form, other than that laid down for the three other castes. The One Object of all worship can be reached by all His children.

Q. Is there any benefit in performing Sandhyâ in addition to Bhajan? is it useful, if we do not know its meaning, and may we not translate it?

Ans. Sandhyâ is a particular form of worship, very wisely designed and including mantras. Ordinary bhajan has not these advantages. A Hindû boy should understand his Sandhyâ, and not repeat it by rote, like a parrot. I have often explained that a mantra loses its use when it is translated. Read Part II, *Elementary Text Book.*

Q. Is there any use in performing our Sandhyâvandanam, without knowing its correct meaning?

Ans. There is use in the devotional frame of mind in which it is performed, in the magnetic conditions produced by the recitation of the

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mantra, and in the obedience which prompts the performance. But every one who performs Sandhyâ ought to be taught its meaning.

Q. Can a woman perform Sandhyâ and wear the sacred thread? If not, why not?

Ans. In modern India, women do neither. In ancient India, women did both. When a woman is married, her husband and herself form ideally one being, and the husband performs Sandhyâ and wears the thread for both. When women led the Brahmacharya life, and were Brahmajñâninîs, they performed the sacred duties for themselves.

Q. How to know the Self?

Ans. The first step is to cease from evil ways. The second to be actively good. By deep study, by meditation, by purity, by self-control, by the mastery of thoughts and desires, a man gradually comes to a knowledge of the Self.

Q. What is meant by seeing the soul in the heart?

Ans. Sometimes the strong realisation of the higher nature is thus described, and this is gained by purity of life and patient daily meditation. Sometimes the speaker means that a shining figure is seen in the heart, sometimes as a minute likeness of a man, sometimes as a vivid flame.

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These are experiences met with in meditation.

Q. What is Prâṇâyâma?

Ans. A measured method of respiration, accompanied with the internal repetition of mantras. It regulates the flow of the prâṇas, and steadies the Sûkṣhma Sharîra. It should not be practised, unless learned from a competent instructor.

Q. Is Prâṇâyâma necessary for obtaining steadiness of mind, and what is the meaning of the word?

Ans. No, it is not necessary, but it is very helpful. Quiet measured breathing helps to regulate the vital currents in the body, and causes the life-pulses to beat regularly and steadily. A strong will, rightly directed, can produce the same results, but the mechanical process demands less putting forth of energy. The word means restraint of breath, from (प्राण) breath, and (यम) to restrain or check.

Q. What is Yoga? Are all its various stages anything but the result of an abnormal excitation of the nervous system? Is there any spirituality in it?

Ans Yoga is a name used to cover the systems which seek an expansion of self-consciousness above the physical state. Excitation of the

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nervous system can, at the most, by producing a condition of tension, enable the consciousness to transmit a little more through it than is normally possible. But such tension, due to physical causes, will not enable more than a few lower astral impacts to come through. Such experiences have nothing spiritual in them, and no Yoga, worthy the name, would seek them. When the etheric double (Prâṇamaya-koṣha) is forced out by chloroform or other anæsthetic, etheric and lower astral sights and sounds are often experienced. The querent would do well to acquaint himself with the working of the various upâḍhis and the related states of consciousness.

Q. Is there any established "Lord's Prayer" in Samskṛt in our Hinḍû books?

Ans. The so-called "Lord's Prayer" is a Hebrew prayer, slightly adapted. There is nothing exactly corresponding to it in Hinḍûism, any more than in Judaism and Christianity you can find the exact prayers used by Hinḍûs. But there are many prayers aud manṭras generally used, which act the same part in Hinḍûism as the Lord's Prayer in Christianity.

Q. What is the use of prayer, if it does not save us from the consequences of doing wrong?

Ans. Prayer opens the mind and heart to good

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influences, and, as a man becomes like that he thinks on, prayer gradually makes a man more like God. Prayer also often brings a man help from beings living in the worlds higher than this.

Q. Can a man meditate by having in his view any image?

Ans. Looking at an image makes it easier to concentrate the mind than if a man lets his eyes wander about. An image is a help to concentration, and most people therefore use one.

Q. Is it in any way sinful to worship idols?

Ans. Read the article, "In Defence of Hinḍûism ; I, Idolatry," in the issue of this Magazine for March, 1901.

Q. Is image-worship declining, and is its decline favorable or unfavorable for India at present?

Ans. I do not know whether the use of images in worship is increasing or decreasing just now. There will always be some people who find pictures and images an aid to devotion, and others who find them a hindrance. A man should use them or not use them according as he finds their use helpful or hindering. The majority of people all over the world, in all ages, have found help from their use, and, when there has been active opposition to them; a re-action in their favor has always followed. In England there are many cathe-

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drals on the outside of which can be seen the remnants of the statues mutilated by the Puritan soldiery ; and inside the cathedrals the descendants of that soldiery are again erecting images to stimulate the devotion of the worshippers.

Q. What and how are the profits of worshipping a stone idol which is lifeless, and in what way is it not sin ?

Ans. We do not carry the ideas of profit and loss, trade and barter, into the region of the spiritual to which worship truly belongs. It is absolutely no good worshipping a stone idol which is lifeless. But the true devotee uses the image as a crutch to support him, as he tries to reach up to the thought of some particular manifestation of the Divine that best suits his temperament. And the love and devotion daily poured upward through the image magnetise it with a certain spiritual (and therefore living) energy, which is further reinforced by beams of Divine compassion that come in response from the Divine, following the line of the least resistance—the channel of the image—that had already been cut out by the worshipper. As regards idol-worship being a sin, the burden of proof lies on the questioner.

Q. May we offer worship at any temple, whether it be dedicated to Vishnu or Mahâdeva ?

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Ans. Surely, yes. There is but one God, and any aspect of Him may be worshipped.

Q. Why is pratiṣṭhā performed to make an image sacred, and why is it not used in worship before this is done.

Ans. "To make it sacred;" to set it apart for a special purpose; to make it a centre of a higher influence; for the same reason a Christian consecrates his church, as you should have told "the Christian boy". Until this is done, the image is an ordinary image; after the consecration it is "set apart" and has new qualities.

Q. Is devotion to Shrî Kṛṣhṇa natural or practical? If practical, how can it be roused? What are the easy ways of it?

Ans. The purest, strongest and loftiest love is devotion. Now, if we have loved well and nobly in past lives, devotion becomes more or less natural in this one. If not, we should work at its development in the present; and it will be a natural thing with us in the future. The following are some of the ways of rousing devotion: (1) We should try to see the good in those round about us rather than their defects; and should try to increase our love for our friends and relations. (2) An ideal should be made and a little time given to quiet meditation on it every morning. (3) The company of devo-

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tees and the reading of the life and teachings of the object of devotion are also very stimulating.

Q. How can one meditate on a particular object, say Shrî Kṛṣhṇa?

Ans. The kind of meditation will depend on the knowledge of the person meditating, and I can only give here an elementary kind. You may begin by reading a short passage, relating some incident of His life. Then close the book and shut your eyes, and try to picture the incident in your mind; think out the scene in its details, and imagine the chief Figure, Shrî Kṛṣhṇa. Then keep your attention fixed on Him, thinking of His wisdom, His kindness, His love; think on any qualities that attract you in Him and wish to have those qualities yourself; and as you do this, you will feel your love going out to Him in reverence and worship. Repeat now and again while you are doing this, some mantra in which one of His names occurs.

Q. It is said that all diseases may be cured by prayer to the Sun; how far is this true?

Ans. The statement is too sweeping. The power of the Sun's rays over all things living on the earth is enormous, and all the life-forces come forth from it. Hence men of knowledge, who can direct these forces, may heal by them; prayer may

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draw the attention of some Ḍeva, who may similarly use them for healing purposes.

Q. Why do Hinḍûs worship a monkey, Hanumân, seeing that monkeys are lower than men?

Ans. You say that a Christian asked you this question, which at once shows ignorance and desire to give pain. Hanumân was a Ḍeva, who took the form of a monkey in order to help Shrî Râmachanḍra. This is plainly stated in the *Râmâyaṇa.* Hinḍûs are not so conceited as to suppose that the human form is the only one in which the Shining Ones can appear.

Q. Should we worship Garuda?

Ans. Garuda is an emblem of Viṣhṇu, His Vâhan, the destroyer of ahamkâra and selfishness. As embodying that ideal, he may be meditated on, if that form be attractive to you.

Q. If a Hinḍû, a Christian and a Musalmân think of God respectively as Shrî Kṛṣhṇa, Jesus and Muhammaḍ, will each go to Heaven?

Ans. Most certainly; if God is worshipped with a pure and loving heart the prayer reaches Him, no matter under what name He may be addressed. The Musalmân, however does not worship Muhammaḍ as God, but only honors Him and respects Him as the prophet of God; he worships Allâh alone.

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Q. Are not people who only pray to God when in trouble great sinners?

Ans. They are very ungrateful, certainly; but it is better to remember God in time of trouble, than to forget Him altogether.

Q. Are Love and Parama Jñâna one thing?

Ans. No. But a man possessed of perfect wisdom would also be possessed of perfect love. Wisdom belongs to the Chiṭ aspect of consciousness, Love to the Ichchhâ aspect.

Q. It is said that God can be attained by love, but Râvaṇa and others reached Him by animosity; how is this?

Ans. You should read the story of Râvaṇa's previous life as a warden in Viṣhṇu's heaven. He chose three lives of outward hostility rather than seven lives of outer devotion, that he might more quickly return to his Lord.

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Q. What is the meaning of the word 'Aum,' and why is it put in every manṭra?

Ans. Long essays have been written on the numberless meanings of this word. It is enough to say here that it is the creative 'Sound' or 'Word,' by which the worlds were built; it was uttered in the highest world, and its vibrations create, preserve and destroy in all the lower worlds. Its utterance throws the Sûkṣhma Sharîra into steady and harmonious vibrations, and this is its use at the beginning of a manṭra. The power of the word varies with the knowledge and purity of the person who utters it.

Q. What is the Gâyatrî?

Ans. The most sacred of manṭras, the invocation to the divine Sun, the Light of God, to shine into our intelligences.

Q. May not a man translate a manṭra into English and then use it?

Ans. It has very often been explained that the value of a manṭra depends on the succession of sounds formed by its correct pronunciation in

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its original tongue. Translation changes the sounds, and thus destroys the mantra. Read on this what is said about mantras in the *Advanced Text Book* where also you will find the answers to your questions about Shrâddha and the sacred thread.

Q Have Mantras any effect on diseases?

Ans. Yes, if the mantra be appropriate and be correctly pronounced. In disease, irregular vibrations are present in the body; the mantra, properly recited, reduces these to regularity. Similar effects may be produced by magnetic passes; the reason is the same in both cases.

Q. Mantras, when rightly repeated, produce special forms. What should we repeat to produce the lovely form of our beloved Lord Shrî Krishna before our eyes?

Ans. There are special mantras for the worship of the different forms of the one Deity; and Vishnu-mantras or Krishna-mantras are the one most suited for the worship of Shrî Krishna. Purity, and intense devotion to Shrî Krishna are necessary to make the mantras *living*.

Q. Can the mere utterance of the name Râma remove our sins?

Ans. The "mere utterance" will only regularise the vibrations of the Sûkshma Sharîra, thus making the mind more susceptible to good influ-

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ences, and shaking coarse matter out of the mental and astral bodies. The conditions will thus be made more favorable for the man when he sets himself to struggle against his weakness. If the name be repeated with devotion, helpful influences will flow to him from Shrî Râma. The Idea that the repetition of the name, without love, faith and effort, will by itself save, is a superstition, *i. e.* taking a part, and an unessential part, for the whole.

A similar question on the "mere lip muttering" of mantras may be answered on similar lines. Certain physical and astral effects follow, just as a sound is produced by the mere blowing of air through mere holes. Effects on the matter of different planes are produced by material means; moral and mental results follow on moral and mental action.

Q. Should God be worshipped in any particular language?

Ans. For general worship, the lifting of the heart to God, any language is equally good. When mantras are used, however, these must not be translated, for their force is lost by altering the sounds.

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Animal Sacrifice.

Q. Why does Hinḍûism allow animal sacrifice?

Ans. Animal sacrifices are not justifiable now, and it is said that the only permissible sacrifice in the Kaliyuga is charity, or gift. It is unfortunately true that some Hinḍûs do still kill animals in sacrifice, but it is no more justifiable than it would be for Christians to do so because it is commanded in their Bible.

Q. How is it that the Veḍas sanction animal sacrifice, while ahimsa is constantly enjoined?

Ans. In past Yugas conditions were very different from those now prevailing, and the way in which "animal sacrifice" was performed then is not in the least understood by modern people. Further, many of the great sacrifices described, as in the Puruṣha Sûkṭa of the *Ṛgveḍa*, were obviously allegorical, and represent kosmic processes. Other precepts, such as forbidding the eating of any meat not obtained from a sacrifice, abolished indiscriminate slaughter, prevented the degradation of the butcher-class and slaughter-

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houses, restricted eatable 'meat' to the flesh of very few kinds of animals, and paved the way for the complete abolition of meat-eating. Lastly it is clearly stated that the only sacrifice for the Kaliyuga is gift, charity, so that any precept as to animal sacrifice is not now valid.

Q. Why do we offer sacrifices of goats to Durgâ?

Ans. Presumably because 'we' are ignorant enough to suppose that the World Mother takes pleasure in the terrible slaughter of Her helpless little ones. See how Surabhî weeps over her brutally treated cattle, and you may learn how Ḍevas and Ḍevîs regard human cruelty. In the Benâres Temple wherein goats are slaughtered the polluted offerings go into non-Hinḍû hands.

Q. As Ḍevas and Ḍevîs are said to be well-wishers of all living beings, why are animals sacrificed to Durgâ?

Ans. They ought not to be so sacrificed. The best worshippers of Durgâ and of Kâlî do not sacrifice animals, but only use symbolical forms made of flour or other substance. Many buy the animals intended for sacrifice and set them free—a far more acceptable sacrifice to the World-Mother than innocent blood.

Q. Should a man kill an animal? Should

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Hindûs sacrifice goats, etc., to Kâlî Devî and others?

Ans. A householder may kill a dangerous animal which intrudes into his house, to defend his dependents. A ruler may kill dangerous animals, that menace the lives of the people in his charge. But to kill animals for the pleasure of devouring their flesh is not right. The only proper sacrifice in the Kaliyuga is Dânam, charity, so animals should not be slaughtered; if men would slay their own vices instead of harmless brutes, the Devî would be much better pleased.

Q. Why are buffaloes sacrificed to the Goddess Durgâ or Kâlî? What is the object of the sacrifice, and is it sanctioned by the Shâstras?

Ans. In this age, there should be no animal sacrifices. There was a time when both animals and men profited by a lofty form of sacrifice, but now there are none having the authority and the knowledge to perform such sacrifice. The World-Mother does not delight in the terror of the poor animals nor in the flow of their life-blood. Better buy them and set them free in Her Name, and worship Her by immolating your own passions instead of the innocent brutes. But it is very absurd for Christian Missionaries to object to these occasional sacrifices, so long as they sacrifice herds of animals for the gratification of their own palates. Oceans of

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blood are shed, scores of millions of animals are sacrificed every year to please Christian appetites, so it is a little grotesque for Christians to object to the few animals killed in mistaken devotion by a few Hindûs. Only those can consistently protest against polluting the temples with blood who also protest against the horrors of the slaughter-house.

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SEA-VOYAGE.

Q. Why is sea-voyaging prohibited by Hinḍû laws?

Ans. It is only prohibited by modern prejudice, which is gradually wearing away. Even in comparatively modern times, Hinḍûs were ship-builders and sailors. A great deal of feeling has arisen against it in consequence of the moral deterioration of many of the young Hinḍûs who have gone to England for study. They have come back wine-drinkers, beef-eaters, and with bad manners. By this, they have thrown obstacles in the way of travel, and have injured their well-conducted fellow-students.

Q. Can Brâhmaṇas go abroad in ships according to our Hinḍû Scriptures?

Ans. Paṇḍiṭs are divided on this point. It is certain that in the older days of India's prosperity Hinḍûs travelled freely abroad, and it is not therefore likely that there was any prohibition in the older Shâsṭras. Lately, a Brâhmaṇa who had travelled to England for his education was publicly received back into caste by Shrî Shankarâchârya of

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the Sringeri Maṭh, the orthodox head of the Hinḍû community in Southern India. The Mahârâja of Ṭravancore, an orthodox Hinḍû, has just established some scholarships for sending some of his subjects abroad for technical education. There is no doubt that Hinḍûs will travel more and more, and will be much the better for doing so.

Q. Is there any rule forbidding sea-voyages in the Shâsṭras?

Ans. The idea that sea-voyages are wrong is modern. Indians carried on a great commerce in the period of India's wealth and prosperity, and even within the last few centuries Indian-built ships sailed up the Thames. It is to be hoped that this modern idea will soon be exploded. More and more good and sensible people are favoring foreign travel. Probably, ten years hence, no one will dream of objecting to foreign travel.

Q. Is Prâyashchiṭṭa necessary for a man who has been on a long voyage?

Ans. Prâyashchiṭṭa is a ceremony of purification, intended to cleanse a man from impurities contracted during conditions unfavorable to his magnetic and corporeal purity. Thus a man may contract some magnetic impurity from being in the company of meat-eaters and wine-drinkers; and he may cleanse his magnetism as a man may cleanse

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his hands from stains. During a long voyage, the contraction of such magnetic impurity is inevitable, and it is desirable to wash it off. No moral impurity need be contracted on a voyage, and no Prâyashchitta is necessary as regards the inner life. If a man regards a sea-voyage as sinful he should not go on it; to go, believing it wrong, with the idea of getting rid of the wrong by a ceremony, is in itself wrong. In such a case, what the man needs is not a ceremony, but the enlightenment of the mind and the strengthening of the conscience.

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Q. What is meant by Pañcha-yajña, and what is its use?

Ans. Do you mean Pañcha-yajña, the five sacrifices? You can read about these and their meaning in the *Elementary Text Book.*

Q. Is the faithful performance of the innumerable ceremonials prescribed in our Hindû religious books indispensable for the attainment of Mukti?

Ans. They have nothing to do with the attainment of Mukti. Their fruit is harvested in this world and in Svarga, and they are intended for those who do not seek to attain Mukti, but wish for happiness in some world of form. The teachers of these "prescribe many and various ceremonies for the attainment of pleasure and lordship." *(Bhagavad Gîtâ* ii. 43.*)* The *Shâstras* are full of statements that Karmas are performed for the gaining of terrestrial and celestial pleasures, not for the gaining of liberation.

Q. What is the meaning of 'impurity' caused by birth and death, and why may some religious

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ceremonies be performed at these times while others are forbidden ?

Ans. As so often explained in these columns, 'impurity' means magnetic impurity, and the regulations made relate to this. The physical concomitants of birth and death attract to the spot many very undesirable elementals, and these more or less hang round the persons in contact with the mother, or the corpse. The mantras which are used are directly designed to improve the conditions, whereas the others would either increase the disturbance or be themselves rendered useless.

Q. What is the use of bathing in the Gaṅgâ ? Why should we regard her as sacred and worship her ?

Ans. Water is a substance very easily magnetised, so that it exerts a purifying and health-giving influence. The water of the Gaṅgâ was constantly magnetised by great Ṛshis, and though it is much weaker than it was, it still retains some holy and beneficial influences. Not long ago, Mr. Hankin, an Englishman, analysed the water of the Gaṅgâ, and though he took water from the dirtiest places he could find, he found that health-injuring organisms could not live in it. He published the fact in a pamphlet.

The river is presided over, is in the charge of, a very gracious and beautiful Ḍevî, and it is this

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Ḍevî Gaṅgâ who is worshipped. By repeating a mantra in which her name occurs, the worshippers become very receptive to her purifying influence, and thus receive much benefit from her.

Q. Is the daily bath for health, or for any religious consideration?

Ans. It is necessary for health and cleanliness, and is thought of as a symbol of inner purification, all outward things bearing, to the religious man, an inner analogy. It is not, in itself, religious.

Q. What is the use of Havanas?

Ans. Offerings to the Ḍevas help in preserving the right order of nature. The Ḍevas of the Elements are the embodiments of what science calls "natural forces," and their co-operation may be gained either by offering or by knowledge. The regularity of the seasons, appropriate sunshine and rain, all depend upon their working, and Havanas were intended to ensure their co-operation with human endeavors.

Q. Is it necessary for a Brâhmaṇa to wear a shikhâ?

Ans. No; many of all castes wear it, and many do not. It is a custom, but not one of importance.

Q. What is the use of the Shikhâ worn by the Hiṇḍûs?

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Ans. It is very difficult to say in the present stage of our knowledge. But the following conjectures seem to be in place: the hair, especially, and also to some extent the nails, seem to have greater or lesser connexion with the magnetic and electric forces of the organism, witness the effect of electricity and of violent emotions upon the hair. Sometimes, in the case of some individuals, the texture is changed from coarse to soft, or soft to coarse, by such emotion or electrical contacts. In others, the color changes. In most cases the hair of the head, or the down on the body is palpably affected and moves or lifts up and down in the proximity of some electrified object, such as a piece of silk. Probably for the Yoga-students who generally preserve and grow the hair, it would serve as a strong place of magnetic and electric forces. 'Religious' people in all ages and places have attached some ceremony or other to the hair. Shikhâs, locks, knots of hair, were probably intended to mark certain brain centres; and they are, by tradition, knotted, or tied up, or otherwise manipulated, during Sandhyâ meditations, or such other conditions where in those centres are supposed to be practised upon. In the case of most people, apparently, there is a 'whorl' of hair at the top of the occiput, a sort of central point round which the hair grows in spiral fashion. This seems to be the proper place for the main

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shikhā ; and probably marks the main brain-centre or chakra, the Brahmarandhra, the coming into activity of which under stress of long practised meditation brings super-physical powers and responsibilities. Any one may try to mildly pull his own hair at various points of the scalp ; only at one point will he feel that he is, as it were, pulling at the centre, the middle point, whence all the scalp is affected evenly ; so to say. All this is purely tentative but perhaps sufficient to make us pause and think a little before discarding world-old customs. (B.)

Q. Is there any benefit in putting on ashes, and if so, what ?

Ans. Ashes obtained from Homa have a certain magnetic value, the value varying with the knowledge and purity of the persons who performed the sacrifice. Ashes, or any other object, magnetised by a very advanced spiritual person, have a highly protective effect ; ordinary ashes used exert a very slightly protective influence.

Q. Why should vibhuti and rudrāksha remove the sins of people who wear them on their bodies, as related in some stories ?

Ans. They do not. Such stories as you quote, if you have given them accurately, are not true. No wearing of vibhuti or of rudrāksha can remove

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sin, or change the divine law which joins misery to wrong-doing. When people are ignorant, such stories as you mention become current, and we meet them in all countries, and they very seriously injure popular morality. Study the law of karma, as laid down in the Shâstras, and you will not believe such tales. See how much even good men suffered, because they had committed wrong actions. Do you not think that if the Pâṇdavas could have escaped the suffering due to their own actions by rubbing on a little vibhuti, they would not have taken so easy a way to happiness? The idea that people can escape from the results of the evil they have done is due to the influence in India of Middle Age Christianity, and is antagonistic to the teaching of ancient Hinḍûism. The wearing of a ruḍrâkṣha mâlâ is useful for its good magnetism, but it cannot suddenly remove evil tendencies.

Q. What is the real object of wearing Ṭulsi-mâlâ and Ruḍrâkṣhamâlâ? Can they be worn by any one?

Ans. All things, mineral, vegetable, animal, and human, are divided into groups, seven in number, according to the number of the Elements and of the kosmic Ḍevas. Each group has its own 'color,' and 'sound,' and 'magnetism,' depending on the predominant guṇa, and its characteristic

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properties arise from these. Tulsi represents the dominating guṇa of one out of these seven groups; Ruḍrâkṣha represents the dominating guṇa of another one. The Tulsi group represents harmony and wisdom. The Ruḍrâkṣha group represents peace and bliss. The wearing of a mâlâ, especially if blessed or magnetised by a competent person, is helpful in trying to realise the qualities thereby represented. Any one may wear a mâlâ, but when the type of the person belongs to the same group as that of the mâlâ, it is a little more useful than it would otherwise be.

Q. What qualities are possessed by the Ruḍrâkṣha beads?

Ans. Every object possesses certain magnetic properties, and these harmonise with certain corresponding colors, sounds, etc. The Ruḍrâkṣha beads correspond magnetically with Shiva manṭras, and such a manṭra recited with a mâlâ of Ruḍrâkṣha beads becomes slightly more powerful in its effect on the Sûkṣhma Sharîra. The magnetism is peace-giving and soothing, tending to calm the passions.

Q. Why is a circle of water made round the plate of food, and why are manṭras recited before taking food?

Ans. The water is intended to make a slight

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magnetic barrier to protect the food, and the sentences are sometimes a prayer, sometimes a thanksgiving, sometimes the declaration that food is taken as the divine life outside us nourishing the divine life in us.

Q. What is the meaning of pouring water round the leaf on which food is placed?

Ans. Once more, the magnetic effect produced. Injurious magnetism is repelled by the magnetism of the water. Most of these old customs are connected with the protection of the actor against injurious magnetism.

Q. Is there any scientific basis for the rule that we should not eat brinjal on the Ṭrayoḍashi?

Ans. Such rules as this are very local, and it is doubtful whether they are anything more than the perpetuation of custom with an accidental origin in some passing event.

Q. Why should we put off our upper clothes before taking food? What harm would be done by eating with them on? And why may we eat with silk or woollen clothes on?

Ans. There is nothing wrong in eating while wearing an upper garment. But the ancients were very particular about cleanliness in food, and bathed just before the meal and put on a fresh cloth, so that there should be no chance of food

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coming into contact with anything that had not been just washed, or that might be soiled. Another thing they wished to avoid was bringing any outside magnetism, easily attached to clothes, into close contact with food. The custom, however, is by no means universal among Hindûs, and is not followed in the colder parts of India. Many of these customs are local, and no question of right and wrong is concerned with them. They are unimportant. Silk and wool are magnetically protective, and are therefore used by some. As you go about in the world, or even about India, you will find an immense amount of variety in all these things. Try to distinguish between trifles and essentials. Many of the old rules are simply hygienic, and were sanctioned by religion because useful to health.

Q. Why do Hindûs regard offerings to Shiva as unpartakable, while they freely partake of offerings to Vishnu or Ganesh?

Ans. Probably because Shiva stands as the type of the Yogî and Ascetic, and articles impregnated with such magnetism are not harmonious with the Grhasthya life.

Q. Why do we sit facing north or east when we pray?

Ans. Facing the east is a well-nigh universal

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custom in prayer; it arises from the fact that the Sun is the great symbol of God, and prayer, in the early morning, was offered facing the quarter where the Sun would rise; many people face west in the evening, *i. e.* towards the setting Sun. Facing the north, in India, is facing the Himâlayas, where many of the great Ṛṣhis live.

Q. What is the use of the Rakṣhabaṇḍhanam round the wrist?

Ans. It is like any other amulet, a protection against evil influences.

Q. *Is there any use in consulting Paṇḍiṭs—who are not generally learned men—as to the dates and hours of marriage and other ceremonies?*

Ans. The Paṇḍiṭs who deal with these matters are versed to some extent in the science of Jyoṭisha, and follow certain definite rules to find the most auspicious seasons. A really trustworthy astrologer must be a learned man in his own abstruse science, which is—outside occult training and knowledge—the ruins of a great science; it is a collection of fragments, and it is very difficult to build them again into the fair proportions of ancient learning. But the cut-and-dry rules for finding auspicious days and hours are easy of application.

Q. What is an eclipse? And why do orthodox Hinḍûs observe it as a religious holiday? Is there

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anything true in the idea of Râhu harassing the moon?

Ans. An eclipse is caused by the shadow of the earth falling on the moon, or by the moon coming between the earth and the Sun. The magnetic conditions prevailing during an eclipse are favorable to 'the dark side of nature'; hence some people fast. The bathing afterwards is to wash off the bad magnetism. The story of Râhu is an allegory.

Q. Is there any harm in taking one's meal at the time of an eclipse?

Ans. It has often been explained in these columns that magnetic and atmospheric conditions are bad during eclipses. It is not, therefore, wholesome to eat during an eclipse.

Q. We Hinḍûs use leathern buckets for our wells and yet will not drink water from a skin. What is the difference between a skin going into a well and water being put into a skin?

Ans. The difference is in convention, convenience, and comparative size. (*a*) Amongst Hinḍûs, leather shoes are worn, skins of various animals are used on different ceremonial and religious occasions, skin bags, kuppas and kuppis are used as vessels for storing ghî, oil, and so on; drinking water also is taken by Hinḍûs from skins in

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some parts of India, in Agra, *e. g* till very lately, when the water-works were introduced and the standing scarcity of drinking water was abolished. (*b*) Where the number of wells is sufficient, drinking water is not taken from those used for irrigation in which leathern buckets are usually dipped. (*c*) Many things are tolerated on a very large, or a very small, scale which are revolting in the medium scale. A score of people bathe simultaneously or successively in the same swimming bath without the water being changed; a second person would not enter a tub that had been used by another, without changing the water. The 'exemptions' and 'exceptions' in the Smṛtis and in the customs of mankind on such points are many. The fangs and saliva of hunting dogs during the hunt to people who eat 'game' meat; the saliva, etc., of horses snorting during rides and drives, are instances from Manu. [B.]

Q. Is skin used all over India for wells?

Ans. Apparently, yes, for purpose of irrigation; though other kinds of buckets are also used in different parts.

Q. Why should Hindû widows shave their heads, put away their ornaments, wear a white Sâri and forsake all enjoyments?

Ans. The Hindû widow is regarded as an

ascetic, and these signs are not signs of degradation, but of the adoption of the ascetic life. A wife who has lived with her husband and has borne children naturally turns away from worldly pleasures when she has parted from him who was her joy in this life; she as naturally finds her happiness in the next life to which he has gone. These signs become inappropriate and unreal when forced on child-widows, who have not been wives, and who cannot possibly feel that which the signs are supposed to express. In most thoughtful families they are not now imposed on child-widows.

Q. What is meant by Saṭi? What is its object, and how did it arise? Is it Hindú in origin, and authorised by the Shástras?

Ans. The word Saṭi primarily meant a wife who was absolutely devoted to her husband. It then, by a natural transition, came to mean a woman who died with her husband. The object of such death was to accompany the husband in his postmortem life, separation being felt to be intolerable. It arose—as a burning with the corpse of the husband—in imitation of very highly evolved women, whose intense purity enabled them to cast off the body by an act of will on their husbands' deaths; other devoted women, unable to accomplish this, deliberately ascended the funeral pyre;

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later, it was forced on widows by local imitative custom. It is thus Hindû in origin, but is not authorised by the Shâstras.

Q. Why do we shave when a relative dies?

Ans. Magnetism clings very much to the hair, and by shaving the hair off the magnetism is removed. A good deal of bad magnetism is contracted in connexion with a death, and the shaving removes it. It is like washing when one is dirty.

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Q. What is the meaning of the Ekâḍashi fast? Does it act on the moral tendencies of a man? If so, how?

Ans. The principle of fasting has often been explained. It helps a man to control his body normally, when he holds it back deliberately, at certain times, from legitimate pleasures. It alters the balance between the dense and subtle bodies, and so enables the consciousness to work more effectively on the dense through the subtle. The Ekâḍashi days have been specially utilised for fasting, because the magnetic relation between the earth and the moon on those days renders this increased influence on the dense body particularly useful to those who are seeking to lead the higher life.

Q. Why are fasts observed once a fortnight, on Ekâḍashi days, and at eclipses of the sun and moon?

Ans. The general object of fasting is to alter the balance between the superphysical and physical energies in man. Fasting lowers the latter, and

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hence enables the former to assert themselves more effectively. Magnetic conditions are largely governed by the sun and the moon. During an eclipse the magnetic conditions are unfavorable, and fasting, slightly weakening the body, lessens the physical basis on which those conditions can work. Fasting on the Ekâdashi of the bright fortnight helps a man to advance in the inner life; fasting on the Ekâdashi of the dark fortnight helps him not to lose the ground he has won.

Q. Was the Ekâdashi fast known in the days of Shrî Râmachandra?

Ans. We cannot find anything about the Ekâdashi fast in Vâlmiki's *Râmâyana;* but we find statements in Adhyâtma *Râmâyana*, and the *Skanda-Purâna* which show that the custom existed at the time of Shrî Râmachandra.

Q. Is there any effect on the life in the other world of the observance of the Ekâdashi (fasting more or less completely on the eleventh day of the lunar fortnight)?

Ans. Fasts and vigils have formed part of the training for superphysical development, or Yoga, in all times and places, and systems of training. Certain conditions of the physical body are indespensable for the bringing about of certain conditions of the subtler bodies. This seems to be the

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underlying principle of all such observances. As to the particular value of the 'Ekâḍashi' it is more difficult to say; but it is fairly well known that lunar cycles and sub-cycles have some connexion with the physiological functions on earth. It may be that the eleventh day of the lunar fortnight marks a time specially favorable for the purpose under consideration, in ways which the expansion of the human knowledge and the recovery of the lost sciences will make plain in the future.

Q. Has such observance greater effect if it happens to be Bhîṣhma Ekâḍashi?

Ans. The underlying principle of such observances, mentioned above, covers this question also; all such religious observances as are specialised by dates are very probably connected facts, which, while they must affect conditions on earth powerfully, are yet, because of their subtlety and distance, not realised by human beings in daily life. Apart from this, a religious observance marked by any great name may have also the less distant use of turning attention to the high thoughts and deeds connected with that name, and further if the bearer of that name happens to be still dwelling in the higher worlds connected with our earth and functioning there for the benefit of human races, then a fast on his day would attract his attention and make it easier for him to give help.

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Q, What benefit is there in a festival, and if a man does not observe it, is there any harm?

Ans. Festivals are of many kinds and of many values. Some are purely religious, others have much of the social element mingling with the religious. They are the anniversaries of important and interesting events, or are dedicated to some Ḍeva or Ḍevî. There are some it is advisable to observe, such as those of deep religious significance, as they give an opportunity for quiet thought, meditation and worship, lift us out of the bustle of modern life, and turn our thoughts to things of real value instead of allowing them to be engrossed by trivialities. We are apt to forget the real things in our eagerness for the unreal, and the festival recalls us to the higher life. Thus they are opportunities of making spiritual progress, and they bring peace and beauty and fragrance into life. Life is dull and sordid and grey in these times, and the festivals bring inspiration to it. A man loses much by their non-observance, but he is not doing any actual wrong. He only loses what he might have had. The more social festivals are often pleasant in the family and among friends; they recall inspiring events, and make life brighter and happier. European peoples have grown duller and more care-worn and hard-worked, since the many religious festivals of Christianity have been largely

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disregarded.

Q. What is meant by the Holi Festival, and why do people abuse one another?

Ans. The Holi Festival has become a popular Saturnalia, and might well be allowed to die out. Some say it commemorates the juvenile sports of Shrî Kṛshṇa, but it has become a time of licence and rough horse-play, resembling the European Carnivals. Abuse is, of course, always wrong; the custom probably originated in some dramatic action. You might read the articles on it in the April 1901 and 1909 issues of the *C. H. College Magazine.*

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Q. Why is holiness attached to special places.

Ans. Good magnetism attaches itself to a place where a holy man has lived, or where many people worship with sincere devotion. A person going to such a place feels an atmosphere of calm and peace, and feels more inclined to meditate and worship than he does in other places.

Q. What is the most sacred place on the face of the earth?

Ans. Shamballa.

Q. Kindly give the history of Shamballa.

Ans. Shamballa was built in Lemurian days, and has ever since been the residence of very exalted Ṛshis. It was the city on the White Island which formed the central capital of the early settlement of the fifth Root Race. No history of it is available.

Q. Why do Hinḍûs regard the cow as the most sacred animal?

Ans. It has always been the custom among Hinḍûs to regard with reverence the means where-

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by they gain their livelihood, and to regard with gratitude all things that make their life happy and secure. Thus there is a day annually when warriors pay honor to their weapons, offering them flowers and sandal; writers to their pens, paper and ink; merchants to the symbols of their trade, and so on. The cow has been pre-eminently honored as that on which household life largely depends; milk, ghî, butter, all come from her; her sons plough the fields, tread out the corn, press the oil-seeds; she is the type of Nature, as Mother and Nourisher; her magnetism is pure and health-giving. These are some of the reasons which have led the grateful Hinḍûs to reverence her. There are other reasons too, but these are more difficult to understand.

Q. Why is the cow a sacred animal while a bull is not?

Ans. The bull *is* a sacred animal, as witness the *Nandî* of Shiva who roams about freely in the streets of Benâres and other cities. No Hinḍû will eat the flesh of the bull any more than he will that of the cow.

Q. Why is silk, which is obtained by killing thousands of insects, regarded as sacred by the Hinḍûs?

Ans. It would hardly be called 'sacred' I

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think. It is used for Pûjâ because it does not take up magnetism, it is a non-conductor. Many Hinḍûs object to using silk obtained by killing the larvae, and only use the silk of empty cocoons, after the larvae have eaten their way out.

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DEATH AND AFTER.

Q. What is death? Why should it be a necessary condition of existence? How can life be cheerful with this dread hanging over it? Is there anything that can free us from this fear?

Ans. Death is the separation of the Prâṇamayakoṣha and the Annamayakoṣha—the etheric double and the dense body. It is a necessary condition of physical evolution—not of existence—because of the narrow limits of the plasticity of physical forms. The life moulds the form, in order to express itself, and when the form reaches its limit of expansion and flexibility, it breaks. With expanding consciousness, more and more highly specialised brains and changed skull-shape are necessary; what could the intelligence of a Newton do incased in the skull of the Cro-magnón man? (The Cro-magnon skull is a well known fragment of very ancient man.) Life may be cheerful when we know that Death cannot touch us, but can only break up our physical bodies. A man is just the same man after death that he was before; he does not die, and he has no more need

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to be miserable about death than about changing his coat; knowledge of the unimportance and of the conditions of death entirely frees us from fear.

Q. The Gîtâ says that souls leave old bodies and take new ones. Then why should a young man die?

Ans. The *Gîtâ* gives the general rule, but does not say that a soul never leaves a body for any other reason than old age.

Q. Are there two kinds of death, कालमृत्यु *and* अकालमृत्यु *?*

Q. Ans. कालमृत्यु, timely death, is death at the "proper time," *i. e.* death at the period for which the body was formed, and when the ripe karma belonging to that body is exhausted. अकालमृत्यु, untimely death, is death which comes before the expiry of this period and is brought about by what is wrongly termed 'accident,' an event caused by the sweep of some law other than that of the individual karma. Sometimes the Ego takes the opportunity, offered by collective karma in which he is involved, to pay off a kârmic debt before it is due. In these cases the ripe karma is not exhausted when the body is struck away, and it is worked off on the astral plane; the regular after-death conditions do not supervene until the life-period has expired, till the true कालमृत्यु.

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Q. Can a man avoid the hour of his death?

Ans. There is a certain period for which the physical body is formed; generally, this hour cannot be changed. But, in some cases, it may be hastened or retarded by unexhausted causes of the preceding life, or powerful causes set going in this. The life-period may also be cut off short by what is called 'accident,' but is then lived out in the astral world, *minus* a physical body. The subject is too large to be fully dealt with here.

Q. What is the distinction between Death and Suṣhupṭi?

Ans. In death, the Jîva leaves the body, clothed in all the koṣhas except the Annamayakoṣha, and there is no connexion left between the Jîva and this lowest sheath, so that he cannot return to it. In suṣhupṭi, the Jîva leaves the body, clothed only in the two higher koṣhas and the finest part of the Manomayakoṣha; he retains a magnetic connexion with the lower koṣhas, and can therefore return to them.

Q. Who is Yama? Has he any emissaries that appear at the time of death, and does he exert any influence over us after death?

Ans. Yama is the Ḍeva who has the duty of watching over the affairs of the world into which men pass after death. He has a large number

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of subordinate Devas under him, who attend to the details of life there, as similar Devas administer here the laws of nature. Sometimes people become clairvoyant at death, and see the beings of the next world, and they often see these in the forms in which they have thought of them during their lives.

Q. What becomes of the Jîvâtmâ after death?

Ans. He goes first into Preta Loka, then into Pitr Loka, then into Svarga; sometimes he goes for a time into Naraka from Preta Loka. You can read the details in the *Elementary* and *Advanced Text Books.*

Q. What becomes of the soul as soon as it leaves the body? What should we do to obtain Svarga? Can we believe in the existence of Svarga and Yama-loka?

Ans. You will find in the *Elementary Text Book* the answer to your first question, and a yet fuller account is given in the *Advanced Text Book.* Svarga is gained by good thoughts, good desires, and good actions, and by performing religious duties. The length of stay there depends on the amount of merit in the life. Svarga and Yama-loka exist. Their existence is vouched for by great men in the past, and there are people now living who are able to visit them and to relate

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what they have seen there.

Q. Does a ghost retain consciousness of his identity, and if reborn, why is the memory of identity lost?

Ans. Consciousness of identity is not destroyed by death. Death merely takes away from a man his physical body, but does not affect his consciousness. The man who has passed through death retains, in his Manomayakoṣha, the memory of his past life. But when his life in Svarga is over, and the time of rebirth approaches, his Manomayakoṣha dissolves and a new one is gradually formed; and though it is true that the memory of the past is imprinted on the next higher Upâḍhi, the Vijñânamayakoṣha, this Upâḍhi is too delicate and subtle to impress the lower vehicles of the ordinary man. Sometimes, in dream or trance, fragments of this memory are recovered, and when a man becomes highly evolved, he remembers his past lives.

Q. Is there such a place as Yamaloka, and is there any such person as Chitragupta?

Ans. Yamaloka is the world into which men pass after losing their physical bodies, after what is called death. Certainly it exists; men do not perish when their bodies die, and as they are still embodied, though only in matter finer than the

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physical, they must be in some place. Loka means place, and Yama is the Lord of Death, so the name describes the world into which we go when we leave this world. The name Chitragupta is the name of an office rather than that of one single person; many beings perform the functions assigned to Chitragupta, and all are called by this name.

Q. If sin enters into Kâmaloka, is there any Government there as here to punish vice?

Ans. Conditions there are very different from here, but there are certainly agents of the law. Most of the suffering results from the non-satisfaction of vicious desires strengthened and encouraged while in the physical body; the sinner is his own executioner.

Q. If progress is open to man after death, what means of advancement are available?

Ans. The exercise of the faculties there, as here. Progress there depends on the exercise of the creative power of thought, to which matter yields there far more readily than here. The amount of progress made is conditioned by the mental and emotional materials carried by the man out of this world, his experiences here being his materials there.

Q. Does the soul of a man enter another body

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instantly after death, or does he wander in the universe for some time.

Ans. The soul is not without 'a body' when he has dropped the physical body at death. He has still his other bodies, or koṣhas. In the densest of these he remains for sometimes in Preṭaloka, and then goes on to Piṭṛloka. Still later he goes to Svarga, in a subtler body, and from Svarga, after a longer or shorter time, returns to be reborn on earth. You can read all about this in the *Advanced Text-Book.*

Q. Do you believe in the existence of ghosts? If so, why do you believe in them when you do not see them?

Ans. I suppose the briefest answer would be: "I believe in them because I have seen them." But we may look into the matter a little more. A 'ghost' is a human being who has dropped his physical body, and he is just as much a human being after he has dropped it as he was before. Now we see the physical body of a human being because that body reflects the light-rays into our eyes, and our eyes are able to vibrate in answer to these rays, and so the vibration reaches us; we use the physical eyes to see the physical body. When a human being has lost his physical body we can no longer see him with the physical

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eyes, unless he is able again to draw some physical matter round him, as a ghost often does. But we can see him by using the finer eyes belonging to our Sûkṣhma Sharîra, just as the coarser eyes see the Sthûla Sharîra. Apart from my having seen ghosts myself, I know many people who have seen them, and there is a very great mass of evidence, which any one can read, given by other people who have seen them. So it is rather foolish and ignorant not to believe in ghosts. 'Ghosts,' however is not a very good word, for many silly and mistaken ideas are connected with it; we should rather talk of a man without a physical body.

Q. What are Spirits? Do they possess any shape, or can they be made to appear?

Ans. The word 'Spirit' is very loosely used. It should mean only the Jîvâṭmâ, the individualised consciousness. This has no shape, nor can it be made to appear. But the word is often used to denote this individualised consciousness *plus* all its material garments except the physical; these material garments—the bodies, sheaths, koṣhas—have shape, the densest assuming the form of the physical body and the others surrounding it in the form of an egg. Read about these koṣhas in the Sanâṭana Ḍharma Text-Books. Such a Jîvâṭmâ may show himself in these bodies. Remember that you are yourself a Jîvâṭmâ, a Spirit, as much

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as you ever will be.

Q. Do Spirits, good and bad, exist in the world after death?

Ans. Death can in no way affect the Spirit; if the Jîvâṭmâ exist at all, his existence is continuous, untouched by birth or death. The question thus resolves itself into: "Is there such a thing as a Jîvâṭmâ?" and this cannot be answered in any convincing way in a brief answer such as is possible here. If you doubt such existence, you should study the many books that have been written on the subject, and weigh the overwhelming evidence for super-physical consciousness. It is easier to explain away matter than Spirit.

Q. Pitṛs go to Pitṛloka; offerings are made for them for many years. Do they stay in Pitṛloka for those years, or do they take birth elsewhere?

Ans. It is possible that a man may be reborn very quickly, and in that case the offerings would be useless. But such an instance would be an exception and the rules are made for ordinary cases. Normally, people stay in Pitṛloka for a considerable time, and then go on to Svarga, and it is only after the period in Svarga is over, that they return to this earth.

Q. What is the interval between rebirths?

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Ans. The length of the interval depends on the material suitable for use in Svarga acquired during the physical life.

Q. *Which is better, cremation or burial?*

Ans. Cremation, for it quickly destroys the body, and thus saves the living bodies around from being poisoned by the products of decay. If a body be buried, it decomposes slowly, sending out the most harmful gases. Cremation is also better for the departed person, as it frees him quickly from the Prâṇamayakoṣha, or etheric double, which disintegrates swiftly when the dense body is destroyed. In burial, this etheric double decays slowly, *pari passu* with the decay of its dense partner.

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Q. Why are seven generations taken as the limit of separation between Sapiṇḍas and Sagoṭrams?

Ans. Because the average time occupied by seven generations represents the average time spent in Piṭṛloka. When the Jîva passes from Piṭṛloka into Svarga, he no longer needs aid from earth-dwellers.

Q. It is believed that the Piṭṛs present themselves on the day of the annual Shrâḍḍhas. It is also believed that as soon as a man dies his soul passes into another physical body. If this is so, how can the soul, present in another body, appear at the Shrâḍḍhas.

Ans. The second belief is a mistake. The Jîva very rarely takes another physical body immediately after death. In those very rare cases, the Jîva would not be present, unless he chose to put his new physical body to sleep in order to attend the Shrâḍḍha.

Q. Why should we perform the Shrâḍḍha ceremony annually?

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Ans. The rules laid down provide for the performance of Shrâddha during the average period spent by an average man in Pretaloka and Pitṛloka. When a member of a younger generation becomes a Pitṛ the member of the oldest generation previously concerned in the reception of the Shrâddha offerings passes beyond their reach. There are always three generations to be provided for; hence the need for the recurring ceremonies.

Q. Why should Hindûs perform Shrâddha if they believe in transmigration?

Ans. What has belief in transmigration to do with the performance of Shrâddha? When a man leaves his physical body, he passes into Pretaloka, and then into Pitṛloka; later, he enters Svarga, and after staying in Svarga for a period which depends on the amount of fruit he has stored up for enjoyment there, he returns to this earth, and is reborn. He passes some time in each of the three worlds, Bhûloka, Bhuvarloka and Svargaloka. Shrâddha is intended to help him during his passage through Bhuvarloka; when he has reached Svarga, it becomes unnecessary.

Q. Are Tarpana and Shrâddha due to the Pitṛs at home and at Tirthas, after the performance of the Gâyâ Shrâddha?

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Ans. That is a ceremonial question, which should be asked of some Pandit. The general principles which govern the performance of Shrâddhas should be studied in the *Advanced Text-Book*, but the details must be learned from some one versed in ceremonial.

Q. Pitṛs go to Pitṛloka; offerings are made for them for many years. Do they stay in Pitṛloka for those years, or do they take birth elsewhere?

Ans. It is possible that a man may be reborn very quickly, and in that case the offerings would be useless. But such an instance would be an exception, and the rules are made for ordinary cases. Normally, people stay in Pitṛloka for a considerable time, and then go on to Svarga, and it is only after the period in Svarga is over, that they return to this earth.

Q. Is there any special effect in throwing the ashes of the dead into the water of a sacred river?

Ans. The Hindû scriptures expressly say so. The enquirer probably means to ask for the why and the how? We can only make guesses and offer suggestions. As the human body is one organism with many organs and constituents, each having its special functions and attributes, even so the earth-globe is an organism with many organs and constituents, each having its special

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functions and attributes. As the human being consists of many physical and superphysical layers, so apparently does the earth world; as there is an inter-connexion between these layers in the one case, so must there be in the other; and, further, there is a connexion between the corresponding layers and organs of the two organisms. (See *Advanced Text-Book.* Sanâtana Dharma Series, No. 3.) Again there are nerves and channels in the physical body of the human being through which information and action are carried to and from the inner bodies. Similar nerves, channels and centres are possibly the tîrthas and holy places of various kinds on this earth. As, under our present arrangements, to take a telegram to the telegraph-office is a good and rapid method of sending a message to its destination along the telegraphic 'nerve,' so who knows but that, in the arrangements established by the spiritual hierarchies, such tîrthas are the centres for easier communication with the subtler worlds. *(x.)*

Q. Is there any greater effect in throwing them into the Gangâ at Benâres?

Ans. See above. There is no doubt that Kâshî of old was a great centre of spiritual and hence of intellectual force. But holy places, like holy streams, must be guarded by holy lives if their influence for good is to continue. *(x.)*

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Q. What is 'Salvation'?

Ans. The word is used in different senses in different religions. The Hinḍû sometimes uses it as the equivalent of 'liberation,' *i. e.* passing beyond the necessity of rebirth. The Christian and Musulmân mean by it escape from going to hell.

Q. Can a man obtain 'Salvation' by dint of his own good actions, or is the agency of a Guru necessary?

Ans. If by the word you have put in inverted commas you mean going to heaven, gaining Svarga, as the Christian means—the term is a Christian term—a man can gain it by his own good actions. If you mean Mukṭi, liberation, then very few, if any, can obtain it without some help and direction, at this stage of human evolution.

Q. Can a person of any religion obtain salvation?

Ans. Most certainly. Did not Shrî Kṛṣhṇa say that He met a man on any road by which that

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man approached Him? One religion suits one person, while another religion suits another. As a man re-incarnates in different countries, he follows the different religions of those countries. The same man is a Hindû in one life, a Christian in another life, a Musulmân in yet another life, and so on. He thus gathers what is good in each, and at last learns that all religions are roads to the Supreme.

Q. May not a Hindû obtain Mukṭi by prayer, without being initiated by a Guru?

Ans. Mukṭi is not attained by 'prayer'; but by a complete absence of 'attachment'—"when the bonds of the heart are broken"—and the knowledge of the Self. A Guru, not necessarily a physical one, always helps in the last stages of bondage.

Q. A learned Shâstri preaches that a man cannot get Mokṣha or Svarga by offering much tilalu and a small sum of money, but can obtain either by giving much money and little tilalu. Is this true?

Ans. It certainly is not true. A man cannot reach Mokṣha by any gifts of any kind, and no *learned* Shâstri could give such teaching without being aware that he was deceiving hearers. Svargic enjoyments may be gained by charity, but it is the charitable *heart* rather than the nature of the gifts made which wins the heavenly pleasure.

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Gifts of money which cause widespread happiness bring, as their karma, worldly prosperity in another life; the loving thoughts which prompt the gifts bear fruit in Svarga. If the gifts are made grudgingly or with a selfish object in view, they are tâmasic, and while they bring worldly prosperity, they do not bring happiness.

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SVARGA AND NARAKA.

Q. Do Svarga and Naraka (Heaven and Hell) really exist, and if so where? and when are they gained?

Ans. Svarga and Naraka do really exist. They exist round about us all the time. (Read *Ancient Wisdom*, chapters on 'Kâma Loka' and 'Devachan.') We qualify ourselves for a life in Naraka by giving way to our lower passions and desires during earth-life; while Svarga is gained by maintaining a constant struggle against our lower nature, by doing acts of love and kindness to those about us, by growing day by day in unselfish love and devotion, and by trying to live up to our highest ideals of thought and action.

Q. With what body do bad men suffer in hell, and good men enjoy in heaven?

Ans. When the physical body is disintegrated, the Jîvâtmâ is still clothed in the Kâraṇa and Sûkṣhma Sharîras. The lower part of the Sûkṣhma Sharîra is re arranged as the body for the Preṭa, and it is the cravings of this Preṭa-body that

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cause the sufferings. The finer part of the Sûkṣhma Sharîra, when the coarser has been purged away, is the body in which men enjoy the pleasures of Svarga. You should read the *Elementary Text-Book*, Sanâṭana Dharma Series. No. 2.

Q. Is it true that men who are killed in battle go straight to heaven?

Ans. Certainly not, except in special cases. It is nowhere said that all men so killed go straight to Svarga. A man whose life is devoted to the discharge of duty, who has conquered desire, who in the midst of battle is unmoved by wrath or hatred, who fights for duty only, and willingly surrenders his body to serve his country, such a man, truly, finds in battle "an open door to heaven".

Q. It is said that if a man dies in Benâres, he is sure to gain Heaven. Is it right?

Ans. We recommend for your meditation the following verse of Shrî Shankarâchârya, which you can get explained by some Shâstṛi if you do not know enough Samskṛt to translate it for yourself:

काशीक्षेत्रं शरीरं त्रिभुवनजननी व्यापिनीज्ञानगंगा
भक्तिः श्रद्धा गयेयं निजगुरुचरणध्यानयोगः प्रयागः
विश्वेशोऽयं तुरीयः सकलजनमनः साक्षिभूतोऽन्तरात्मा
देहे सर्वं मदीये यदि वसति पुनस्तीर्थमन्यत्किमस्ति ॥

Q. Is every man entitled to go to Svarga after

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leaving Pitṛloka? If so, what is the meaning of virtue and vice?

Ans. No man's life is either wholly virtuous or wholly vicious. A man whose life has been predominantly virtuous, and only occasionally vicious, will be but a short time in Preṭaloka, and will pass on to Svarga for a long time. A man whose life is predominantly vicious, and only occasionally virtuous, will remain a long time in Preṭaloka, and have a short time in Svarga. Each seed bears its own fruit.

Q. Is there anything like heaven or hell?

Ans. That depends on what you mean by the words. If by 'heaven' is meant a temporary state of happiness after death, long or short according to a man's deserts, then it exists. If by 'hell' is similarly meant a temporary state of unhappiness after death, long or short according to a man's deserts, then it exists. But if by these words are meant everlasting states of happiness and misery, then they do not exist.

Q. Do Svarga and Naraka exist? If so, where?

Ans. Certainly they exist; wise men of all religions have taught that they exist, and many lesser people, in ancient and modern times, have seen and still see them. They are situated around

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us, and extend also very far beyond the earth, but as these worlds are composed of matter different from the physical, they are not visible to ordinary eyes.

Q. Are there any such places as heaven and hell?

Ans. People are 'in' heaven or hell according to their state of consciousness. As places, we are in them now, and may become conscious of them by the opening of our inner senses. They are 'places' as the earth is a 'place.' Yet a disembodied person may be here, close beside us, and not be conscious of the earth.

There are three worlds closely related to each other, and to each we are related, as we have bodies made out of the matter of which these worlds are composed; a man is conscious in each of these worlds as the matter belonging to each becomes well organised. The physical body is well organised, and we are conscious of the physical world. The subtle body, made of the matter of the next world, Bhuvarloka, is well organised in some people but not in most; such people are conscious of Bhuvarloka all the time; most people only become conscious of it after they have lost their physical body. Hell is a state of unhappiness in Bhuvarloka. The subtle body belonging to the third world, Svarga, is well-organised in very few people; they are conscious of Svarga all the time; most

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people become conscious of it only after losing their physical and denser subtle body; that is heaven. Read about the three worlds in the *Elementary Text Book.*

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REINCARNATION.

Q. Does a ghost retain consciousness of his identity, and if reborn, why is the memory of identity lost?

Ans. Consciousness of identity is not destroyed by death. Death merely takes away from a man his physical body, but does not affect his consciousness. The man who has passed through death retains, in his Manomayakoṣha, the memory of his past life. But when his life in Svarga is over, and the time of rebirth approaches, his Manomayakoṣha dissolves, and a new one is gradually formed; and though it is true that the memory of the past is imprinted on the next higher Upaḍhi, the Vijnânamayakoṣha, this Upaḍhi is too delicate and subtle to impress the lower vehicles of the ordinary man. Sometimes, in dream or trance, fragments of this memory are recovered, and when a man becomes highly evolved, he remembers his past lives.

Q. Is it true that the souls of some people migrate into birds, quadrupeds, and even into reptiles,

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after their death, as commonly believed by the Hindûs ?

Ans. It is true that a human soul, descending to rebirth on the physical plane, may be arrested on the astral plane—if during its previous incarnation it had formed very strong bestial affinities—and be attached to the body of some animal until these affinities are worn out. The soul remains a human soul, a human consciousness, although tied to an animal form, and is acutely conscious of the misery of its bondage. The animal jîvâṭmâ whose body serves as a prison for this unfortunate human being, remains in its own stage of development, the human jîvâṭmâ being its co-tenant for the time.

Q. Do not heredity, environment and will account for the differences in life ? if so, why should we trouble about re-incarnation ?

Ans. Re-incarnation is a fact in nature, and should therefore be recognised, Physical heredity does not explain mental differences, as, to take an extreme case, genius. The leading biologists of the day in the West deny the transmission of acquired qualities. Physical heredity is a fact to be taken into account, and is utilised in re-incarnation. Environment can only be explained by re-incarnation, if there is justice in the universe; so also with will; why should one person be strong-

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willed, another weak-willed, if neither has a past? You had better read *The Necessity for Re-incarnation.*

Q. How can a man escape from constant birth and death? What is meant by "Certain is death for the born and certain is birth for the dead"?

Ans. "When all the bonds of the heart are broken, then the man becomes immortal." So says the *Upaniṣhat.* This means that when a man gets rid of all the desires that bind him to earthly objects, then he becomes liberated and is no more reborn. We are drawn to rebirth by our wish to enjoy worldly objects. The shloka from the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* means exactly what it says; a man who has been born is sure to die; and those who are now in the heaven-world—whom we speak of as "the dead"—are sure to be reborn.

Q. How could Christ, being so great, make the mistake of not believing in re-incarnation?

Ans. He did not make any such mistake. The Jews of His time believed in re-incarnation, so there was no need for Him to preach it; but He shewed His own belief when the disciples asked whether the man born blind was suffering from his previous sins. Jesus did not answer, as a modern Christian would do: How can a man suffer for sins committed before he was born? but merely said that that was not the cause of his blindness.

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He further told the disciples that John the Baptist was the prophet Elijah.

Q. Is the soul immortal? If it is, how is it born from one mother after another?

Ans. If the Jîva perished at death, he obviously could not take another body, but if he does not so perish, why should he not pass into another body? The Jîva is not born—he is unborn, perpetual, eternal, and ancient (*Bhagavad-Gîtâ.* ii. 20)—but he passes from body to body. Put your question another way, and you will see that your difficulty is not a clearly thought-out one: "Is a man alive? if so, how can he put on one coat after another?" It is because he is alive that he can change his coat; it is because the Jîva is undying that he can change his body.

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Q. *What is 'destiny'?*

Ans. What Hinḍûs call Karma; the result of the past working out in the present. Read the chapters in the *Sanâtana Ḍharma Text Books* on this subject. If you want to understand the subjects on which you send so many questions, you must study. You will learn very little on complex subjects from the brief answers which are all we can give here; they are fully treated in books which you should read.

Q. Every action we do depends on our thought and surroundings, and these depend upon the brain and the surroundings given us when we came first into the world. We did not get them of our own accord. Are we not then bound?

Ans. The brain with which we are born in this life depends on the thoughts we cultivated in a previous one; it is of our own making. So also our circumstances in this life depend on our actions in a previous life. We bind ourselves, and we can gradually free ourselves; each life is bound

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by preceding lives, but we can, when we have knowledge, gradually file away the fetters of the past, and prepare greater freedom for the future.

Q. I am very anxious to know how far predestination influences the course of human life.

Ans. Predestination is a word usually applied to the ordering of events by an external supreme Power, and there is much confusion of thought about it, because people do not study the forces at work in nature. The general line of evolution of a universe is laid down by its Supreme Ruler, or Îshvara. He writes the drama which is to be played out in it. As regards the actors in the drama—each of whom is a part of the Îshvara—they choose their own parts, not by a single act of volition, but by their repeated desires, thoughts and actions. A man predestinates himself by his desires, thoughts and actions; he can change these by the teachings of experience, by the advice of his elders, by his own efforts and thus alter his self-predestination. He cannot suddenly change in the present much of the destiny he has made in the past, any more than a man can change the crop of rice he sowed into a crop of barley. Where he has predestinated himself to be the possessor of a bad temper, he cannot suddenly change it into a good one; but he can gradually alter it by right desire and right thought. When

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you understand the law of karma, you can consciously choose your own destiny and then create it. Your little plan will find its proper place in the great plan, and you predestinate your little plan as Ishvara predestinates His great one.

Q. If the destiny of a man in a future life is determined by his thoughts, desires and actions in the present life, what is the destiny of a child who dies a few minutes after birth?

Ans. Obviously the karma which remains unexhausted from his past. A child thus dying has expiated some trivial offence in the past, and the rest of the karma remains unchanged, the Jîvâtmâ quickly taking on a fresh body.

Q, Is it possible to avert the misfortune that must befall us because of action done in a previous birth?

Ans. There is no general answer to such a question. If the misfortune is in the Prârabdha Karma, it cannot be averted. If its causes are not fully completed, counterbalancing forces may be brought to bear upon it. You must study the principles that underlie the law of Karma, if you want to understand special cases. You should read the T. S. manual *Karma*; the chapter on it in *The Ancient Wisdom*; the very elementary statement in the *Sanâtana Dharma Catechism*, and the

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fuller explanations in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*, elementary and advanced.

Q. Is the shape of a man formed according to his Karma?

Ans. Certainly it is. Suppose a man has exercised his thought power and developed his intellectual faculties, he will then have a brain fitted to express these faculties, well-shaped and well-developed. The body is shaped to meet the requirements of the incoming Jîvâtmâ, so that he may have an instrument suited to his powers. Evil thoughts and desires, cruelty and passion, cause a deformed body in extreme cases, and in all cases result in a body deficient in strength or in beauty and refinement. Nothing is outside the law of karma.

Q. If I perform a good or bad action, will the reward or punishment reach me in this life, or in the next?

Ans. Impossible to say. Some actions are immediately followed by their consequences; of others the consequences are long delayed.

Q. If a man does a good or bad action, when will he get the result of his action—in this life or after death?

Ans. That depends on the nature of the action. Some actions bear fruit very quickly, in the

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present life. The trace those actions leave on the character is immediate, and may be lasting. Habits persist after death, and bad habits cause much misery in the life beyond the physical. The most far-reaching results grow out of desires and thoughts.

Q. Why is one human being happy and another unhappy? If it depends on karma, why should one man follow good and another evil, when God has given to each equal sense at their first creation?

Ans. The first question is answered by the fact that sorrow treads on the heels of evil, and happiness on the heels of good. Evil, being against the law of evolution, causes friction and hence pain; good, being with the law of evolution, is harmonious and hence brings peace. Every Jîvâtmâ begins its course enveloped in ignorance; every Jîvâtmâ gathers experience by acting with and against the law, and reaping joy and pain. Looking at a fragment of the life, one is seen as enjoying and another as suffering, but looking at the whole all are seen to have periods of happiness and periods of pain.

Q. Can we improve our fortune and avoid misfortune in this life by doing any virtuous act?

Ans. The general answer is given above. One

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life is not cut off sharply from another, and it is impossible to say when a particular action will bear fruit. It is like a question, "when does fruit ripen?" Some actions bring pain or joy very quickly, others after a long time.

Q. Will God satisfy our necessities without our efforts if we lead a holy life?

Ans. A man receives always exactly what he deserves. If he is giving his whole life to the unselfish service of others, then his necessities will be supplied; not otherwise. If his holiness consists in "a glorified selfishness," seeking liberation, salvation, for himself, careless of the world, then nature, the outer garment and agent of God, will be careless of him.

Q. Why do the good always suffer in this world?

Ans. They do not always suffer. Some good men have exceptionally peaceful and happy lives. But very many do suffer, because they are making very rapid progress, and are quickly paying off the debts which stand in the way of their liberation.

Q. Why do some admittedly good people suffer so much in this world? If it is expiation, why do not the traces of all the evil done show in their characters?

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Ans. Suffering is not always an expiation; it is sometimes a purification, and is sometimes a voluntary bearing of the world's karma. Even when it is expiatory, it does not follow that it is the result of gross sins, of sins that the world condemns. A wrong desire, or a slight mistake, of a very good man may entail on him much greater suffering than falls on a bad man for acts of profligacy, drunkenness or passion. Moreover a highly advanced soul does not regard suffering as worldly people regard it: to him it is often welcome, as helping him in his efforts to detach himself from worldly objects. The stripping away of worldly objects is often a preparation for the inflow of Divine life.

Q. How can a good God visit the apparently guiltless and young with death?

Ans. God does not 'visit' people with anything. There are certain laws of harmony which lead to general happiness; when people selfishly go against these laws they bruise themselves, and then complain that God 'visits' them with troubles. Suppose a father says to his child: "My son, if you eat so many sweets you will be ill." The boy persists in over-eating and gets a stomach-ache. Is it the father who gives the stomach-ache, or the boy's own greediness? When people have greedily eaten too many sweets in one life,

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often taking other people's shares as well as their own, they suffer in another life. "As a man sows, so he reaps."

Q. Will we be forgiven our sins, and shall we be punished for them if we are truly penitent?

Ans. The idea of 'forgiveness' is very confused, as I have said before. Christians use it to express the removal of a penalty—hell; but it does not with them include the removal of the natural temporal suffering caused by wrong-doing. Take a case; a man is a drunkard and has ruined his health; he repents; the Christian says, "his sin is forgiven;" but he remains a physical wreck; the Hiudû says that the ruin of his health is the karma of his drunkenness and that he must bear it.

What does the Christian then mean by saying his sin is 'forgiven'? He means that God was offended with drunkenness, and that that anger of God is now removed; a supposed anger is balanced by a supposed pacification. Christians frighten people with a threat of everlasting torture, and then console them with forgiveness. Religions which do not have everlasting torture do not need its correlative forgiveness. I need not repeat here what has been formerly said as to other meanings attached to the word.

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Q. A man leads a sinful life, and prays to God to forgive his sins; another leads a virtuous life, and does not pray; will the prayers of the first, and the actions of the second, bear any fruit?

Ans. Prayers for forgiveness unaccompanied by change of life, are fruitless and hypocritical; strictly speaking, sins are not forgiven, if by 'forgiven,' it be meant that the wrong doer will escape the consequences of his actions. None can escape the working of the Law. "As surely as the wheels of the cart follow the heels of the ox, misery follows sin." The man who leads a virtuous life will reap the fruits of his good actions, as surely as the other will reap the results of his evil ones. His character will grow more noble, his attitude to the good more confirmed, and love and happiness will come to him, The absence of prayer, *i. e.* of opening his heart to the sunshine of the Self, will not affect these results, but he will miss the joy and peace of feeling himself part of the greater Self.

Q. Why should not God alleviate our misery?

Ans. We cause our own misery; when we do wrong and foolish things we suffer, and the suffering teaches us not to do them in future. The only way to grow strong and wise is by experience. We are part of a great whole, and we cannot be

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happy unless we are in harmony with the whole; pain tells us when we are out of harmony, and thus warns us to put ourselves right.

Q. From the law of karma it is manifest that God cannot remit sins; what then is meant by the shloka: "Having cast away all duties, come unto me alone for shelter; sorrow not, I will liberate thee from all sins"?

Ans. Such liberation is within the law of karma; the man who has made his union with the Divine perfect has set going a force which frees him from all the attractions yielding to which is sin. The overmastering attraction liberates from all lesser attractions. This teaching is quite meaningless, or even misleading, for the ordinary man, whose heart turns longingly to objects; therefore it is said to be "most secret of all," and it is never to be spoken to one who is not an ascetic devotee.

Q. Will a man be forgiven for his sins if he prays daily or repents?

Ans. If by forgiveness you mean, will he escape the consequences of doing wrong, No. If a man flings himself against a wall, he will bruise himself; law is like a wall, and doing wrong is flinging oneself against the wall. 'Repenting' does not cure past bruises. The false teaching

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that a man can do wrong and escape the consequent suffering is very demoralising.

Q. Suppose a sinner repents and asks forgiveness of God, can he be forgiven?

Ans. What do you mean by 'forgiven'? If you mean, can he immediately escape from the results of his wrong-doing—no, he cannot. But his repentance is a new cause, as it sets him against his sin; it is a force to undo the worst result of the wrong-doing, the deterioration of character. And his turning away from the sin and towards God is like a man turning his face away from a wall and towards the sun; the sunlight warms and cheers him, and this warming and cheering of the heart is what the repentant sinner feels, and calls 'forgiveness'. He can then accept gladly the suffering which follows his sin and teaches him wisdom.

Q. If the law of karma is irresistible, are prayers for averting sorrow, or for winning happiness, useless?

Ans. This question is often asked, and springs from a confused idea of karma. Karma is a result of the past which is continually being strengthened or weakened, made up of innumerable strands of desires, thoughts and actions, some working in one direction and some in another. The answer in

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any given case depends on the constituents of the karma which is acting. If it is very strong in one direction, we cannot suddenly put enough desire thought and action against it in the present to neutralise the past, or turn the result in the opposite direction. If it is weak in one direction and we can bring to bear in the other very strong desire, thought and action, we may overbear it. Prayer may thus turn the balance where the scale of karma is not heavily weighted, for it is a strong desire, *i. e.*, is of the nature of one of the constituents of karma.

Q. As there is no responsibility for actions in infants, lunatics, etc, why should there be punishment or reward for ordinary men, who do not understand that certain actions are wrong?

Ans. The words punishment and reward are out of place here. Certain results follow certain actions; they may be painful or pleasurable. If on the physical plane an infant, a lunatic, an ordinary man, not knowing that fire burns, put their respective hands into the fire, each will be burnt. You cannot call this a punishment, but a result. And so with all other *natural* laws. Nature teaches by pleasure and pain; her sequences are lessons, not rewards and punishments. An infant or a lunatic does not make astral or mental karma, because he is not starting causes on those planes.

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The ordinary man produces results according to the force of his consciousness; the more he knows and wills, the more marked the results.

Q. In order to gain freedom ought we to give up action? How can action be done without desires? If done as a duty, we identify ourselves with the action, and are we not thereby bound?

Ans. "Man winneth not freedom from action by abstaining from activity," says Shrî Kṛṣhṇa (*Bhag. Gîtâ.* iii. 4). Action does not bind, unless it be prompted by desire, as it is normally, for the results, or fruit, of action. When once a man abandons the desire for fruit for himself, and works only as an instrument of the Divine Will, offering his action as a sacrifice to Îshvara, all bonds are broken. "With such object, free from attachment, O son of Kuntî, perform thou action" (*Bhag. Gîtâ.* iii. 9). We are not bound by an action when we perform it only because it ought to be done and offer it as a sacrifice, for we neither identify ourselves with the action as its doer, nor attach ourselves to its fruit. You should study carefully the third Adhyâya of the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ.*

Q. Is karma beginningless? Please explain Bhagavad-Gîtâ xiii. 19, 20, in this connexion.

Ans. 'Karma' is beginningless, but an individual's karma has a beginning in time and an ending in time. The Jîva, enveloped in matter,

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comes into time, *i. e.* succession; where there is matter, eternity can only reflect itself as endless succession, and hence matter is said to be the "cause of the generation of causes and effects".

Q. The Hindû religion teaches that the happiness or misery experienced in this life is the result of good or bad actions in past times. I hear that there is a book called "Karma Kanda" which traces particular miseries or happinesses to particular origins in deeds of a past birth. Will you kindly let me know if an English translation of this can be had?

Ans. There are such works, called *Karmavipaka*, but none has been printed, so far, it seems. Amongst printed works, whole chapters of the *Mahâbhârata*, and of many of the *Purâṇas*, are devoted to this subject and trace special diseases, pieces of good or ill fortune, and other pleasant or unpleasant circumstances of the present life to special conduct in past lives. B.

Q. What is the meaning of Bhag. Gîtâ xviii. 48? Must a Thug not give up murdering because he is born to such a karma from a Thug father?

Ans. The word in the text is better translated 'defective' than evil' or 'criminal'. We may have made for ourselves unsatisfactory circumstances by bad actions in the past. We

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should accept the circumstances patiently, and live the best life we can amid those circumstances. A Thug should certainly give up murdering; he cannot inherit from his father a karma of murdering. Such a karma could only come from his own passionate, revengeful desires in a previous birth.

Q. How does blind Nature come to know the karmas of men, and contribute elements for building the gross body?

Ans. There is no such thing as blind nature. The Devas superintend and direct the workings of 'force and matter,' and use in the building of a body the materials suitable for the working out of karma.

Q. Does a man commit sin by thought only, though he does not carry the thought into effect? Is he responsible for his evil thought?

Ans. People use the word 'sin' in various senses; we may define it as a disregard of any law of right. 'Right' is that which is in accordance with the Divine Will, as manifested in evolution. Most of the 'right' is concerned with our relations with others, with the making of these relations mutually beneficial. Now thought is a very strong energy, and when we put forth this energy we affect other people as well as our-

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selves. An evil thought injures our character, and hence is a fruitful source of future suffering, since a man of bad character does harm in all the relations of life, and spreads misery around him. Further, the evil thought influences others for evil, and as evil and unhappiness are indissolubly linked together it increases unhappiness. The act is less mischievous than the thought, for its range is far less extensive. A man is responsible for all his activities, whether of the nature of desire, thought or action. By 'responsible' is meant that he reaps the result of all these activities; they all rebound on him.

Q. Why is a man led into temptation?

Ans. It is not accurate to say that a man is 'led' into temptation. A man, at any stage of evolution, short of perfection, has weaknesses in his nature, and, as he walks through life, these weaknesses cause him to go astray and to fall into errors. By these errors he learns wisdom, and gradually gets rid of his weaknesses.

Q. What is the exact definition of 'Puṇya and Pâpa?

Ans. Puṇya is merit, and the word is used to denote the fruit of good actions. If a man does right, karma brings him happiness, and that happiness is said to be merited by him. The

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happiness of Svarga, enjoyed by a man after death, is said to be the payment of his merit, his puṇya, and when the result of his good deeds, his puṇya, is exhausted, he does not remain any longer in the enjoyment of Svarga, but returns to earth. When people no longer look for reward for their good deeds, they do not care to accumulate puṇya. 'Pâpa' is sin, and is also used to denote demerit, the opposite of merit. Misery is the kârmic payment of Pâpa.

Q. Does past karma cause a Pariah to be born as a Brâhmaṇa, or a Brâhmaṇa as a Pariah?

Ans. Obviously if a Pariah develops Brâhmaṇa virtues, he will be reborn as a Brâhmaṇa, and if a Brâhmaṇa develops vices belonging to an early stage in evolution, he will be born as a Pariah, or in a similar class abroad. Thus many Brâhmaṇas in the Madrâs Presidency are taking to European wines, spirits and liquors. They will certainly be reborn either as Pariahs here, or in the corresponding degraded class elsewhere.

Q. If the very good Pariah die, in what caste will he be reborn.

Ans. He will be born in the caste suited to his qualities, whatever they are, like anybody else. If he be already spiritually developed, it is obvious that his birth as a Pariah is either

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voluntary, in order to uplift his people, or compelled, in consequence of some grave fault in a previous life; *e. g.* he may have been a Brâhmaṇa, full of spiritual pride, sent into a Pariah body to learn humility.

Q. Why should sacrifice offered to an unworthy Brâhmaṇa bear fruit?

Ans. In the first place it generally does not bear any fruit; in the second place it sometimes bears evil fruit—Manu and Vâsishtha definitely prohibit it; thirdly, if it ever does bear good fruit, then it does so because the love and faith that offer the sacrifice are the real fruit-bearers, and because all sacrifices are offered to the Self, and not to the form in which the Self is embodied. On sacrifice, you should read the chapter in *The Ancient Wisdom*. On Ḍharma, read the three lectures published under that name.

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ETHICS.

Q. How should a Hindû begin and pass his life?

Ans. This is rather too large a question for the 'Letter-Box'. Speaking generally, he should perform the Dharma incumbent on him by his birth and circumstances, with the aid of the teaching in the Hindû sacred books. For details read *Hindû Ideals*, and *Ancient Ideals in Modern Life.*

Q. What is the difference between virtue and vice?

Ans. The will of Îshvara guides His universe along the path which is best for it. Every creature who tries to go along this path, in accordance with the will of Îshvara, is acting virtuously; every creature who tries to go off this path, or to go backwards instead of forwards, is acting viciously.

Q. What is sin, what is good, and what is virtue?

Ans. Big questions like these cannot be answered in a few lines. Read the first chapters of Part III in the Sanâtana Dharma *Elementary Text*

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Book, and the corresponding chapters in the *Advanced*.

Q. If Bhîṣhma be the incarnation of Ḍharma, why did he fight on the wrong side?

Ans. Because it is a man's Ḍharma to be loyal to his country when it goes to war, whether he thinks its quarrel just or not. If England goes to war with a country, English generals must lead their men against the enemy, whether they agree or not with the Government as to the justice of the war. A soldier who deserts to the enemy and fights against his King and country is a traitor.

Q. How do you justify Yudhishṭhira's falsehood about Ashvatthâmâ?

Ans. I do not justify it. See *The Story of the Great War*, page 191. The telling of a lie is never justifiable. Have you not noticed that when he told the falsehood, his chariot sank to the ground?

Q. In what Purâṇa does it say that Râḍhâ was married to Kṛṣhṇa? If she was not married to Him, was not her conduct wrong?

Ans. How could any Purâṇa say Shrî Kṛṣhṇa was married to Râḍhâ, when He was only a child when He played with her? You are probably thinking of the *Gîta Govinḍa*, but that is a modern production, a poetical rhapsody. Râḍhâ has ever been taken as the type of the human Jîva, wholly

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devoted to God, and the allegory is a very beautiful one; it should not be coarsened into a physical love-affair.

Q. In the November issue of the Magazine the conduct of Bhîṣhma in fighting against the Pâṇḍavas is explained. But what of that Bhibhîṣhaṇa, who deserted his brother and King Râvaṇa in order to join Shrî Râmâ.

Ans. The different stages of evolution of the two explain the difference of conduct. For a Râkṣhasa to recognise the greatness of Shrî Râmâ and to join Him, renouncing all he held dear in life, was to make a great step forward; he had not reached the stage whereat Bhîṣhma stood, where he could recognise his separateness from the body, and let his body pay its debts by fighting for its King, while he himself bowed in worship before Shrî Kṛṣhṇa whom he loved as his Lord. Speaking generally, the first duty of a soldier, be he private or general, is to his King and country; where his conscience imperiously forbids such fighting as these demands, he can resign and bear the consequences; a knower of Ḍharma, like Bhîṣhma, can recognise all the claims on him, and pay each in its appropriate coin. In times of civil strife, many cases of conscience must arise, and the man is judged by his motive rather than by his action. Good men will

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be found choosing differently, and fighting on opposing sides in such cases.

Q. In the Bhâgavaṭa Purâṇa x. 32, it is said that we should follow the precepts of great men, not their acts. Does not such teaching make us lose all reverence for God?

Ans. Not if you think a little. A great Sage, acting as the channel of the divine will, working for the good of the world, may have to bring about a catastrophe. To condemn his action would show ignorance. A father may do many things that to his children seem mistakes, because the children are ignorant. A judge may condemn a thief to imprisonment, but a boy has no right to imprison another boy. A King may take some of his subjects' property in taxation, but we must not take away what belongs to others. There are many acts done rightly by persons in authority that would be wrong, if done by us.

Q. What is the meaning of Bhagavaḍ-Gîṭâ xviii. 66. "Abandoning all Ḍharmas, come unto Me for shelter"?

Ans. The shloka should be read with shlokas 64, 65, 67. It is addressed only to the devotee, who has entirely surrendered himself to the service of the Lord. Having thus become free from all personal desires, having no personal hopes or fears

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or wishes of any kind, he is ready to act merely as a channel of the divine will, such a man has no special Ḍharma growing out of his position in the world ; any of the numberless activities of the Lord can work through him, and the work is the Lord's not his.

Q. It is written in the Bhagavaḍ-Gîṭâ, vi. 9, that a man should behave the same to friends and foes, the righteous and the unrighteous. But how can we behave the same to the righteous and the unrighteous? ought we not to love righteousness and hate unrighteousness ?

Ans. Nothing is said as to behaving the 'same'; the expression is समा बुद्धिः equal, or balanced, mind. The mind should act impartially and with perfect justice, not being swayed by personal likes and dislikes. Many people are very kind to their friends, but indifferent or unkind to strangers or enemies. You may love righteousness and hate unrighteousness as much as you will, but you should not hate a bad man, nor behave unjustly towards him.

Q. The experiences of our mighty Sages show them to have been imperfect, and their controversies are undecided. If truth be truth, why could it not prevail all over ?

Ans. If experiences are imperfect, how can the

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vision of Truth be perfect? The imperfection is due to the limitations of the experiencer, and these limitations are a condition of embodied existence. The sun is the sun, but the power to utilise his beams depends, in each man, on his organs of vision. No amount of brilliance in the sun will make a blind man see. One Sage sees one portion of the infinite Truth, another Sage sees another portion. People see the two fragments, and do not see the connexion between them. Many controversies arise from fragments of Truth being taken as the whole.

Q. It is said we should follow the path of the great Ones. Prahlâda is regarded as a great One, and he disobeyed his father; should we imitate him in disobeying our fathers?

Ans. Arjuna was a great One, and killed many; it does not therefore follow that we should kill people. The circumstances must be considered under which an action is performed; otherwise, endless confusion will arise; also the character and knowledge of the actors must be considered, as Dharma varies with character and knowledge. Only if the circumstances are similar and the actors are similar in character and knowledge, may the exceptional acts of great Ones, contrary to the ordinary moral law, be safely imitated.

Q. If a man's parents order him to eat flesh, what should he do?

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Ans. If the 'man' be a child, a youth, he should obey. If he be grown up, he should state his views clearly and respectfully, and win his parents' consent. No parents can coerce their grown up sons in such matters.

Q. When the good of my country needs me on the one hand and the good of my father on the other, what shall I do?

Ans. Speaking generally, the nearest duty is the one to be done first, and for a boy his duty to his father is the most imperative; a boy's idea of what is his country's good is not likely to be reliable. But there are exceptions to the rule, and the country's need may be so great as to override all other claims. In such cases, however, the person concerned would not ask other people what he ought to do; he would *know*, with an inner conviction that would need no strengthening from outside. Heroic natures may rightly take exceptional courses, but such natures act on their own responsibility, and feel no need to lean on the advice of others. When an ordinary man, seeking the advice of others, follows the heroic path, he finds himself unable to tread it and fails. Hence the advice given to those who seek it should always be: "Follow the general rule of morality". The fact that they seek advice on the matter shews the absence of an inner compelling conviction.

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Q. Is charity good or bad?

Ans. Charity is good when love and pity are given to a proper recipient; it is bad when given ostentatiously, or grudgingly, to an undeserving object. Proper objects of charity are: the helpless aged, the maimed, blind, and diseased, the forsaken orphan child; also the learned Sannyâsî and true Yogî. In times of famine any starving person is a fit object, and it is well never to refuse food to a hungry person; but if a strong, healthy man refuses a meal and demands money, it is best to refuse him. Undeserving objects are: vigorous, healthy men, wandering about idly, who are ignorant and lazy, and merely want to live on the industrious. Alms to such people injure both the giver and receiver.

Q. Is it proper to feed first ignorant and vicious Brâhmaṇas and Sâḍhus, and then the poor and sick?

Ans. It is not proper to feed vicious people first or last, nor ignorant Brâhmaṇas and Sâḍhus. Vicious people should be helped to reform themselves by working hard for their living, and the ignorant should be taught. If they will neither work nor learn, they are not fit objects of charity.

Q. Why is it not considered a crime to deprive calves of their natural nourishment? All over the

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world milk is taken away by man.

Ans. It would be very cruel to deprive calves of their mother's milk, and I do not think it is ever done. But, by artificial breeding, cows have been made to produce very much more milk than their calves could consume without danger, and this surplus milk may rightly be used by man. The calf should always be first fed, and care should be taken that it has enough.

Q. If an animal which generally lives upon another animal is found to be attacking another animal to use it as food, is it proper for a man to interfere?

Ans. Read the story of King Shiba in the *Elementary Text Book*, or in the original. A man certainly need not roam about in the woods, seeking to save one animal from another, but whether he should interfere when a beast of prey seizes his food in his presence is a question on which much difference of opinion exists. Each person must judge for himself in such a matter.

Q. Is the killing of injurious insects allowable?

Ans. A thoroughly good and loving man will not kill them merely to save himself a little pain. He would kill a reptile whose bite was dangerous to life, like a snake or a scorpion, if it were attacking a human being or a higher animal, and if there

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were no way of saving the victim save by killing the aggressor. But wherever possible, he would remove the reptile to a distance rather than kill it. This is the highest law: अहिंसा परमा धर्मः। The ordinary householder, who is not yet learning to see the Self in all things, is not acting contrary to *his* Ḍharma in killing death-dealing creatures who intrude into his premises.

Q. What should a young boy do if he feels himself inclined to the Nivṛtti Mârga?

Ans. He should go quietly on with his studies, obeying his parents and teachers; he should give some time in the early morning and in the evening to worship; and he should do his work because it is his duty, and not for the sake of reward. In fact, he should be an exceptionally good and noble boy, and he may be sure that, if the feeling lasts, he will find his way of life open out before him in his manhood, as a true servant of humanity.

Q. Can an ordinary man imitate Shrî Râmachandra, and lead a life like His.

Ans. An ordinary man certainly cannot lead a life perfect as that of Shrî Râma. But he can try to imitate Him, and so improve his own character. When a teacher sets a little child a sentence to copy, the child will not write it as well as the teacher; but he will improve his writing as he

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tries to copy that of the teacher, and presently he will write well.

Q. If I regard as righteous what others regard as sinful, may I follow my own criterion?

Ans. If the 'others' are people of age, experience, knowledge, and above all of purity, you should be exceedingly cautious, and look all round your proposed action, before you perform it. If your view is not sanctioned by good and intelligent people, it is probably wrong. If you, after full consideration, and being of an age to act on your own responsibility, decide against the views of others, then act on your own judgment, and if you are wrong, you will suffer, and learn to go on the better way hereafter.

Q Is Cosmopolitanism good? was not Svâmi Vivekânanda cosmopolitan? and ought we not to follow his example?

Ans. If by 'cosmopolitan' you mean liberal, broad-minded, able to sympathise with the ways of all countries and to adapt yourself to them, then it is very good. If you mean by it indifference to your own country and absence of public spirit, then it is very bad. Svâmi Vivekânanda was cosmopolitan in the right sense of the word, and was also intensely patriotic, as you can see from his speeches.

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Q. If a man finds in the road a dropped object, the owner of which he does not know, what should he do?

Ans. Try to find the owner, obviously, giving notice to the police that he has found it. His own common sense must choose suitable means of letting it be known that he has become possessed of another man's property.

Q. What is right non-resistance? Should a Gṛhasṭha accused of a fault, seek to prove his innocence or not? The Itihâsas give conflicting examples.

Ans. A Gṛhasṭha may rightly prove his innocence when falsely accused, if he wishes to do so. He should consider the matter from all points of view, and then act for what seems to him to be the best. A Sannyâsî would not, as a rule, trouble to defend himself, but would leave all to the good law. Self-defence is appropriate on the Pravṛṭṭi Mârga, idle on the Nivṛṭṭi, unless undertaken for the sake of others.

Q. Though contentment is a source of happiness, would it not stop all progress if it were general?

Ans. During all the earlier stages of evolution, discontent of a certain kind is a most useful spur to progress. But even then, it will be a hindrance if it consists of mere irritability and

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impatience. Rational and sober discontent unaccompanied by irritation, *i. e.* disapproval of evil conditions and resolve to change them, is always useful in society. At a high stage of progress, discontent is not needed as a spur, for the only spur then needed is the fixed will to co-operate with the divine will in evolution.

Q. What is the easiest way to uproot passions: to resist, or to enjoy and then leave them?

Ans. As Manu says, you might as well try to put out a fire by pouring butter into it, as to extinguish passions by yielding to them. The moment you recognise any form of gratification as wrong, as injurious to yourself or others, you should resist it to the utmost of your power. Even if you fail, you have lessened the force of the passion for its next attack.

Q. What are the duties to be fulfilled by a man who wishes to reach the highest happiness?

Ans. A man's duties depend on his age, position, and stage of evolution. You should study carefully the Third Part of the *Elementary Text Book*, if you want to understand general and particular duties.

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Q. A Correspondent criticises Mr. P. Govindarajulu's statement, in November, 1905, that the flesh of an animal, who suffers pain before death, becomes poisoned: he thinks that the cooking of the flesh would destroy the poison. Does it do so?

Ans. Not necessarily so. There are many cases on record in which people have been poisoned by eating meat in which ptomaine poisons have been found. But whether meat is really poisoned in consequence of the terror of the animal when it is dragged to the slaughter-house, is another question, and on that I know nothing; nor do I know on what authority Mr. Govindarajulu based his statement.

Q. Is vegetarian diet good from the physiological standpoint?

Ans. Yes; it conduces to endurance and vitality; coolies living wholly on vegetarian food are notoriously strong and enduring; the Highlanders of Scotland, living in a cold and wet climate, live largely, and many of them exclusively, on

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oatmeal; most Scotchmen are brought up chiefly on oatmeal, though a few are vegetarians on principle, and they are, as a rule, stronger and tougher than the English, who feed so much more on meat. It has lately been pointed out that many diseases are due to the presence of too much uric acid in the blood, and this arises chiefly from the products of meat digestion.

Q. (a) Is meat nourishing? (b) Has a man any right to take mutton to keep up his health, and thus be serviceable to his family and the country? (c) If a boy's father desires his son, who has given it up, to eat meat, ought he to resume such food or to disobey his father? (d) If we commit so many sins, why should we not take mutton? (e) If a doctor advises meat during a serious or chronic illness, should it be taken?

Ans. (a) Yes, but not so nourishing as dâl and many other vegetable products. It is stimulating, and gives a brief access of strength which is soon exhausted, and the eater becomes hungry again much sooner than after a meal of nourishing grains. The grain-eater is much more enduring than the meat-eater. Meat-eating also gives rise to many diseases, and meat is very readily tainted, and then becomes actively poisonous.

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(*b*) He had far better keep up his health by avoiding mutton. The idea that meat is more health-giving than other kinds of food is a superstition. The blood is purer, wounds heal more easily, fever is less readily caught, and if caught more readily cured, among people who do not eat dead animals. The form in which this question is put begs the whole matter; it assumes that a man will keep better health on mutton than on ḍâl-rotî.

(*c*) The boy should obey his father in such a case; it is better that he should injure his body than that he should stain his character by filial disobedience. If the father cannot be persuaded to allow his son to leave aside meat, the son should obey.

(*d*) This is a very funny argument, though you say many people use it. Because a man often loses his temper, therefore he may as well kill the lower animals. Would you argue: "Because I gamble, therefore I may as well commit forgery"? Surely we should try to improve ourselves, and not make one wrong act an excuse for doing another. Your friends who argue on this line cannot be serious.

(*e*) I should change my doctor instead of my diet. Doctors differ in opinion as much as laymen, and I should choose for my doctor a man

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whose opinions on these matters chimed in with my own. Many London doctors have come to the conclusion that meat-eating is at the root of many of the diseases prevalent in England, and are substituting for it a non-meat diet. Meat produces great quantities of uric acid and this causes rheumatism, gout, and many other serious diseases.

Q. Why cannot we Hindûs eat meat?

Ans. Many Hindûs do eat meat. Kṣhaṭṭriyas have always done so, but in the old days they usually hunted the animals they ate. Brâhmaṇas are advised against it, but are permitted it under certain restrictions. Vaiśhyas are not, so far as I know, under definite rules, but for the most part abstain. Shûdras are allowed it. But the rule, "Harmlessness is the highest duty," puts the ideal to be aimed at, and Bhîṣhma's dictum, "The slayer shall be slain," gives the warning. On the general question see the article, "The Food we eat".

Q. Why should Brâhmaṇas not eat flesh?

Ans. Because the bodies of Brâhmaṇas ought to be kept very pure, in order that spiritual forces may flow through them to help the world. Also because Brâhmaṇas ought to be examples of tenderness and compassion, and the slaughter of animals is cruel and pitiless.

Q. Is there any harm if Hindûs take fowl?

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Ans. There is harm in destroying a sentient creature to gratify the palate. "Ahimsa is the highest duty," and to slay sentient creatures is distinctly 'himsa'. Apart from the general question of slaughtering animals for food, there is the special objection to fowl, that, like the pig, the fowl is a very unclean feeder.

Q. Are there any prayashchittas for those who eat flesh? If so, what are they?

Ans. A body polluted by flesh-eating can gradually be purified by abstinence from flesh, but it takes a long time. Fasting quickens the purification, by wasting away the polluted material.

Q. If, according to modern theories, everything is living, why may we not as well eat animals as vegetables?

Ans. For the obvious reason that animals have a very sensitive nervous system, and vegetables have not.

Q. Is a Sannyâsî or a Yogî at liberty to eat meat at his pleasure?

Ans. A man who is a lover of all creatures, and who is seeking to help all, should surely avoid the infliction of pain caused by the slaughter of highly organised animals. Overwhelming necessity may drive him to it, but he will avoid it, if possible.

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Q.° Were there not great moralists, philosophers and theologians in flesh-eating western nations?

Ans. Certainly there have been, and are, great men of the types named, and of other types, also, who were flesh-eaters Why should there not be? Ability and virtue are surely not confined to vegetarians! But this does not touch the arguments put forward in favor of a non-flesh diet. It might equally well be said: "Are there not great men who were polygamists? "We should answer: "Yes; but none the less, monogamy is a purer type of marriage than polygamy."

Q. If a man be suffering from a fatal disease and the only remedy is to eat flesh, may he then eat it?

Ans. Questions based on an unlikely or impossible assumption are not very useful. It is like asking, if a square were round how many corners would it have?' I know of no disease for which the eating of flesh is the only remedy. The giving of flesh in serious disease by European doctors is generally a sign that the patient is beginning to recover. If such a case as the questioner assumes be possible then the person concerned should consider his duties and his spiritual position. A Sannyâsî might let his body die, under such conditions, where a Gṛhastha should preserve it.

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Q. In the case of degeneracy of the nerves, and non-secretion of gastric juice is there any objection to the use of artificial pepsin ?

Ans. In all cases of disease, it is well to consult a competent physician, and to follow his advice. A pure diet promotes and preserves health ; but where persons have become diseased by impure food, irregular living, or any other cause, the rules suitable to the healthy have to be modified to fit each particular case.

Q. When the atmosphere is full of animalcula, so that it is impossible to prevent these creatures from getting inside us, as we inhale the air, are we not forced to violate the fundamental principle of vegetarianism.

Ans. Not of any vegetarianism that I know of. The fundamental principle of vegetarianism is to support our own lives with the least possible infliction of injury on other lives. The vegetarian takes living things as his food just as does the flesh-eater, for all things live ; but he chooses the living things which do not suffer pain in being used as food. So we constantly breathe in myriads of living things, but they are none the worse for their visit to our lungs. They sometimes hurt us, since some are germs which multiply in our bodies and cause diseases.

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Q. If it be wrong to eat the flesh of animals is it not even more wrong to take milk or eggs?

Ans. It is wrong to eat flesh, because we can only get it by cruelty and killing; it is unwise to eat it, because the magnetism is bad, and it predisposes our bodies to disease. Taking milk and eggs inflicts no pain, and no killing. A cow, by man's training, produces much more milk than her calf can take, and this larger production has been brought about by rich food and careful breeding; how does the cow suffer thereby? The first reason; then, is not valid against milk and eggs. Milk, has very good magnetism and builds up a healthy body; so the second reason against flesh-eating does not hold against milk. Eggs have had magnetism; so the second reason is good as against their use as food.

Q. Which foods—animal or vegetable—are best suited for a student, and why? Is there any good book on the subject?

Ans. The Perfect Way in Diet, by Dr. Kingsford, is a good book, dealing with the value of a vegetarian diet. Animal food is very unsuitable for a student: it increases the animal passions, and makes Brahmacharya more difficult. Simple and nourishing vegetable food is best—dâl, rotî, bhât, vegetables, ghî, milk. On this food, health will be

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preserved and strength increases.

Q. How can we know that plants have no sensation of pain, in order that we may be sure, when we are killing them for use as food, that we are not doing a cruel act?

Ans. From the ordinary scientific stand-point, plants have not a highly developed nervous system, and therefore are not capable of experiencing acute pleasure or pain. From the Occult stand-point it is observed that they do not suffer or enjoy with any acuteness, but only have a vague general sense of welfare or the reverse in favorable or unfavorable conditions.

Q. As certain plants behave just like certain animals, when we cannot make out where unconsciousness ends and consciousness begins, so that we cannot accurately draw a line of demarcation between the animal and vegetable kingdoms, is it not as sinful to cut such plants and trees, as it is to kill animals?

Ans. It is a pity you are not a little more precise, and do not tell us to what plants you allude. I do not know of any plants that behave "just like animals," except among the Protista, which are not definitely classed in either kingdom, as they are not definitely either plants or animals. But no one makes a meal out of Protista, and if

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they are unconsciously swallowed they are none the worse. Some plants eat flies and bits of meat; but I do not know that any one proposes to eat these, any more than any one proposes to eat a tiger; flesh-eaters in civilised countries do not eat carnivorous animals, because their flesh is very coarse and rank, and birds living on flesh are avoided, for the same reason. It is true that a line cannot be drawn between the animal and vegetable kingdoms in their lowest stages as in the Protista above mentioned, but it is not quite sensible to argue from this that there is no difference between a cabbage and a cow. The point is that if you cut a cabbage you inflict no pain; if you cut a cow you inflict pain. No amount of sophistry can enable you to escape this plain fact, and it is because of this that many of us are against flesh-eating

Q. May a Brâhmaṇa drink iced lemonade?

Ans. Surely a Brâhmaṇa can decide for himself as to taking ice and lemonade; I should say it depends on the purity of the water used and the cleanliness of the method of manufacture.

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Q. What do the various symbols given to Mahâdeva mean, and why should He be said to be in the burning-ground?

Ans. The serpent is the sign of wisdom, the tiger skin of the conquest of passions, the elephant skin of strength, the skull of the subjection of the body—the body is as dead—the ashes of burned up desires and magnetic purity. He is the Lord of the burning ground, because His fire burns up all that is evil, all that is temporary, and purifies from all dross.

Q. What are the meaning of the Shaṅkha, Chakra, Gadâ and Padma in the hands of Vishṇu?

Ans. The Shaṅkha is the symbol of creation, for creation is by sound, and the conch represents sound. The Chakra is sometimes regarded as the wheel of time, the whirling of change, and therefore a symbol of destruction. The Gadâ is the symbol of preservation, of the maintenance of order and harmony of rule. The three symbols, thus interpreted show the three aspects of Îshvara,

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the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer. Various other meanings may be found in these symbols, which are very full of significance. The Padma is the symbol of the universe, composed of spirit and matter.

Q. What is the significance of Vishnu lying on a seven-headed serpent?

Ans. The coiled serpent is the symbol of eternity; the recumbent Vishnu intimates that the universe is in pralaya, and that the Preserver is therefore quiescent: the seven heads represent the sevenfold cycle of Time, the conditioned manifestation of infinite duration.

Q. Shrî Krishna's complexion is said to have been dark blue. Is this historical or allegorical?

Ans. The color indicated by the word translated 'blue,' has been much discussed; the same question has arisen with regard to Greek heroes. It may mean only dark—that He was very dark-complexioned. In painting Him, blue has been used to indicate His all-pervading nature, the blue of space.

Q. Why was Shrî Râma's color black and Lakshmana's white?

Ans. The color is blue, rather than black and as in the case of the similar color ascribed

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to Shrî Krṣhṇa indicates the presence of the Avaṭâra of Viṣhṇu. The color is symbolical of the sky, the atmosphere, the all-embracing, all-sustaining life. The white of Lakṣhmaṇa is to contrast with that of Shrî Râma, and should be tinged with yellow, so that the two Brothers sum up in themselves all colors. The color of the chief Avaṭâra in a manifestation of Viṣhṇu is dark blue (not black), as a symbol of space, Viṣhṇu being the all-pervading Spirit. When the manifestation is fourfold, as in the case of the sons of Dasharaṭha, one of each pair of brothers is dark, one fair, as representing the dual nature of the Deity.

Q. The numbers 7 and 3 play a conspicuous part in our Smârṭa and Shrauṭa Kriyâs? What is the mysticism that generally underlies these numbers?

Ans. Three is the root number of manifest existence. Read all there is on this in Bhagavân Dâs' *Science of Peace.* Seven is the number of the present cycle of life—seven worlds, seven planes, seven principles, etc. etc.

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Q. Is Astrology true?

Ans. There is a true science of Astrology, and here and there a real Astrologer may be found. But, for the most part, modern astrological prophecies of events are unreliable. Even modern astrology, however, is often fairly accurate in the delineation of character.

Q. Are the predictions of astrologers always true, and what is the connexion between the lives of men and the stars?

Ans. The predictions are not always true, for all the conditions are not known. Every star has its own magnetic sphere, and these spheres intermingle in a very intricate way; according to the constitution of the human being some magnetic conditions are favorable to him and others not. An astrologer may correctly predict certain events or circumstances, but he can very rarely—only if he be a man of very high knowledge—predict how the person will re-act on them, and the changes thus brought about. He knows one of a pair of forces

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and not the other, so cannot forecast the resultant.

Q. How can we reconcile free will and the functions of the Devas, with astrology?

Ans. There is no antagonism. A horoscope, if correctly drawn, shows the results of a man's past karma, his character, tendencies, circumstances, etc. The horoscope does not show how the man will re-act on all these; his re-action, if he be a feeble soul, will be slight and cause but small changes, but, if he be a strong soul, will work large ones. Hence the astrological proverb: "The wise man rules his stars, while the fool is ruled by them." I do not understand what functions of the Devas are supposed to conflict with astrology—supposing a true science of astrology is meant. Modern astrology is very fragmentary, and hence its results are often very uncertain.

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Q. What are "The Laws of Nature"?

Ans. They are the invariable sequences existing in nature. Knowledge of them may be gained by the study of science, and more of them are discovered as knowledge increases. Some are given in the Shâstras.

Q. Whether we accept the laws of nature or not, they act and we feel; how do the laws of spirituality act upon the atheist?

Ans. This question seems to show some confusion of thought. We are by no means conscious of the action of many laws. For instance, few people are conscious of the play of magnetic forces round them, and there are many forces to which we are quite insensitive. As a blind man cannot see the light, nor a deaf man hear music, so some are blind and deaf to spiritual light and sound.

Q. What is meant by matter and Spirit?

Ans. 'Spirit' conveys the same meaning as the Samskṛt term, 'Puruṣha': it is the life in

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everything, the consciousness. 'Matter' is Prakṛti, that which has extension, which takes form, and is, in many of its aggregations, knowable by the senses, can be seen, heard, smelt, tasted or felt. Your body is made of matter; you, as a thinking, feeling being, are Spirit. That which thinks in the body, which sees and hears and feels, is Spirit linked with matter. Matter embodies Spirit. You can read much about matter and its properties in modern books of science, and in the Upaniṣhaṭs you can learn something of the nature of Spirit.

Q. Is matter self-made or self-existing? if so, is it co-existent with God?

Ans. 'Matter' is a word used to express the antithesis of consciousness, that of which the 'I' is aware, as not being itself. It is not self-made, nor self-existing, but is dependent on consciousness, outside which it has no existence. If you want to study these deep questions, you must apply yourself seriously to metaphysics and philosophy. In Bhagavân Dâs' *Science of Peace*, you will find a useful chapter, tracing the main tendencies of western philosophic thought up to Fichte, and this may guide your studies.

Q. What is meant by the 'everlasting materials' of which universes are fashioned? Is there anything

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everlasting save God ?

Ans. Mûlaprakṛti and Pratyagâtman are co-everlasting. They are the two aspects of Brahman, the Eternal ALL. The Saguṇa Brahman, or Pratyagâtman, is not the ALL, but the Subject aspect of the ALL; Mûlaprakṛti is equally the Object aspect of the ALL. The universes are fashioned by the interaction of these Twain, rooted in One.

Q. If the electric current flows from east to west, why do not winds blow always in the same direction ?

Ans. Why should they? Winds are due to local differences of temperature. Have you not read in your school-book how an artificial wind may be set up between two rooms, which are at different temperatures ?

Q. In which direction does the earth-electric current pass, and if from east to west, why does the needle point to the north ?

Ans. The main electric current in the earth passes from east to west. A magnetised needle sets itself at right angels to an electric current, when it is placed within a coil in which the current is flowing. Hence the magnet sets itself north and south, at right angles to the current flowing from east to west.

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Q. What are 'good' and 'bad' magnetism?

Ans. Every person, according as his thoughts, emotions and passions are pure and benevolent, or the reverse, sends out vibrations which are harmonious or jangling. In the first place he is said to send out 'good' magnetism, and in the second 'bad'; the expression is somewhat loose.

Q. Can dogs see etherial and sûkṣhma beings whom men normally are not able to see at present?

Ans. Yes; dogs, like cats and ants for instance, are able to see, *i.e.* respond, to certain ranges of vibration to which the normal human eye is not able to respond in the present stage of its evolution. So that part of what to us is darkness (or the invisible spectrum) is light to cats and ants, as is well-known. Sometimes dogs are seen barking in the night without the least apparent cause. That is because they are put out or frightened by the sight of certain etheric or sûkṣhma sheathed entities who happen to be seen by them. It may be mentioned, however, that this sight of subtler matter in dogs, as also in some savages, produces vague and indefinite impressions and not the clear and definite knowledge which belongs to the harmonious interworking of the rational and psychic faculties.

Q. What is psychometry?

Ans. The reading of the surroundings in which

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an object has been, in the magnetic field which surrounds it. If we touch an object, we have affected it, and if we have it with us for some time we affect it thoroughly; a dog recognises an article belonging to its master by the scent; the psychometer describes the character of the person who has had it about him. Very often the psychometer is able to describe the place and the people where the object has been. Scenes and faces rise up before him when he touches an object that has been in and among them.

Q. What is the meaning of Jñâna and Vidyâ respectively.

Ans. Vidyâ is any branch of learning, any special kind of knowledge, any science, and even skill in any art or craft. Jñâna is knowledge in the more general sense, and above all the knowledge of the Supreme, wisdom in the true sense of the term. Jñâna is sometimes called the Paravidyâ, the highest learning, the supreme science, while Vidyâ is used as the equivalent of Aparavidyâ, the lower learning, all kinds of science and art. All the Aṅgas are included under Vidyâ. We read in *Muṇdakopaniṣhaṭ* (I. i. 5): "The lesser (Vidyâ) includes the *Ṛk*, *Yajuh*, *Sâma* and *Aṭharva Veḍas*, accent, ritual, grammar, glossary, prosody and astronomy"—branches of learning. Again in the *Chhândogyopaniṣhaṭ*. (*VII.* i. 2, 4, and ii. 1) we

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find enumerated many Vidyâs, as Deva Vidyâ, Bhûta Vidyâ, Kshetra Vidyâ, and so on.

Q. Are Love and Parama Jñâna one thing?

Ans. No. But a man possessed of perfect wisdom would also be possessed of perfect love. Wisdom belongs to the Chit aspect of consciousness, Love to the Ichchhâ aspect.

Q. Did Christ exist? or was the biblical account drawn from the "Srimad Bhâgavata" and modified?

Ans. Jesus, called the Christ, was a historical character, born about one hundred years before the date called Anno Domini. Much of the life as recorded is legendary, for reasons that it would take too long to explain here. He was a Hebrew by birth, of exceptionally pure and lofty character, and a mighty spiritual Being became incarnate in him to found the Christian religion for the helping of western civilisation.

Q. Have trees life? If they have, do they feel pain when fruits, leaves, etc. are plucked?

Ans. Certainly trees have life; all things live. But the Jivâtmâ in the tree is not sufficiently unfolded to be conscious of pleasure or pain, except in a very general way; a vague pleasure in sunshine and rain is felt: a vague pain in drought.

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Picking leaves or fruits causes no sensation of pain.

Q. As certain plants behave just like certain animals, as we cannot make out where unconsciousness ends and consciousness begins, so that we cannot accurately draw a line of demarcation between the animal and vegetable kingdoms, is it not as sinful to cut such plants and trees as it is to kill animals?

Ans. It is a pity you are not a little more precise, and do not tell us to what plants you allude. I do not know of any plants that behave "just like animals", except among the Protista, which are not definitely classed in either kingdom, as they are not definitely either plants or animals. But no one makes a meal out of Protista, and if they are unconsciously swallowed they are none the worse. Some plants eat flies and bits of meat; but I do not know that any one proposes to eat these, any more than any one proposes to eat a tiger; flesh-eaters in civilised countries do not eat carnivorous animals, because their flesh is very coarse and rank, and birds living on fish are avoided for the same reason. It is true that a line cannot be drawn between the animal and vegetable kingdoms in their lowest stages, as in the Protista above mentioned, but it is not quite sensible to argue from this that there is no difference between

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a cabbage and a cow. The point is that if you cut a cabbage you inflict no pain; if you cut a cow you inflict pain. No amount of sophistry can enable you to escape this plain fact, and it is because of this that many of us are against flesh-eating.

Q. Is the famous Hindû mathematical work, the "Lilavaṭi" of Bhaskarâchârya printed in any language?

Ans. The *Lilavaṭi* has been printed several times in its original Samskṛṭ form, and once or twice with commentaries also. The book can be bought in the large Samskṛṭ bookshops. B.

Q. Is it true that animals, after their deaths, are born in better and better forms, evolve a step higher? If so, why are we not justified in killing them, in order to improve and hasten their evolution?

Ans. Animals are not necessarily born in a higher form after death: they progress by gaining experience, as we do, and when you deprive an animal of its body, you deprive it of its means of gaining experience, and thus retard its evolution. A body takes trouble and time in the making and it is a pity to destroy it, since it serves the Jivâṭmâ to obtain experience by which alone he can unfold his powers.

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Q. What is the use of being a Theosophist, if a Hindû finds his own religion even more than he can practise?

Ans. Theosophy will help him to practise his own religion better, will give him a much fuller understanding of it than he can otherwise obtain, and will enable him to defend it against attacks. Hinḍûism was being deserted by crowds of the English-educated Hinḍûs, when Theosophy entered the field, roused them to a sense of the value of their own religion by explaining and justifying it, and was the chief factor in the present revival of Hinḍûism.

Q. What advantage has an enlisted Theosophist over one who is a Theosophist at heart?

Ans. The advantage of sharing in the glorious work of unifying religions, of working for Brotherhood, and of being one of the pioneers to bring about a nobler stage of civilisation. To be an enlisted Theosophist is one of the greatest privileges a man can have.

Q. Why should a Hindû become a member of the Theosophical Society?

Ans. There is no reason why a Hinḍû, or anybody else, should become a member of the T. S. unless he eagerly desires the honor of membership. The T. S. does not run about begging.

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people to become members; but if a man be of good character or is trying to improve, and is earnestly desirous of serving his fellow-men, then the T. S. is willing to admit him to its fellowship. A man comes into the T. S. primarily to be of use to others, to serve as a channel through which spiritual life may pour into the religion to which he belongs, to lend his help to the lifting of the world, to be honored by being used by the guardians of Humanity in their great work of blessing men and of quickening evolution. It is a piece of very good karma that brings a man into the T. S. and we can only be sorry for those who are shut out from this privilege by their bad karma.

Q. We are very much distressed by the statement that Mrs. Annie Besant pretends to sympathise with Hindûism in order to gain influence over people, and then turn them into Christians. What proof can you give that this is not so?

Ans. Why should you be distressed by statements made by foolish, or ignorant, or malicious persons? These falsehoods are started for the most part by people who wish to hinder the Hindû revival by discrediting one of its most active workers, or by very ignorant persons, who hate and suspect every one whose skin is not of the same color as their own, or by people who feel a natural distrust in the reality of English

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friendliness. Surely you can see that I have nothing worldly to gain by helping Hinḍûism, except abuse from the missionaries and their friends, here and abroad. I cannot give any proof that I am not playing this shameful game, for no such proof can, in the nature of things, be given. No man can prove that he is not plotting a murder, which he will carry out some years hence: if his word be not taken, and his good character goes for nothing, he can only wait till his death convinces his slanderers that they were mistaken. And so with myself. If my work for Hinḍûism does not speak, no words of mine are of any avail, and I can wait patiently till death sets its seal on my loyalty to India and her faith. I do not blame the honest among these people who accuse me; it is natural, inevitable, that such suspicions should arise, and I am thankful to be allowed to exhaust in my own person some of the bad karma made by the race to which my body belongs in its dealings with Indians in the past. Suspicions of the good faith and good will of the English to the Indians are natural. May some of us, who are working here, pay some of the kârmic debt, and sow seeds of love and trust for future harvesting.

Q. A Christian said to me that the Christian nations were more prosperous than India, and that

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therefore Christianity is the best religion. What do you say to this?

Ans. First, that material success is no proof of spirituality. Secondly, that if his argument be true, no one should have embraced Christianity in its early days, for the Jews were a conquered people, Judea a province of the Roman Empire, and the Roman Empire was Pagan not Christian; if the early Christians had held the peculiar views of your friend, Christianity would have perished. Thirdly, that according to the Christian scriptures, "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth"; so prosperity is a curse, not a blessing, according to Christianity. Fourthly, that Jesus said: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God," so that the Christian nations must be in a very perilous state. Fifthly, that if this be true, a man should change his religion according to changing successes of the various nations, and all the Russian Christians should become Buddhists and Shintos like the Japanese. Sixthly, that India was a great and prosperous nation in the past with Hinduism, and that her decay has accompanied the lessening of her spirituality. Therefore she will do well to revive her ancient faith, and not to desert it in favor of a modern religion, unsuited to her national characteristics.

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Q. Which religion is best, and what is the end of each religion?

Ans. As a rule, the best religion for a man is that in which he is born, and he should not change it hastily, or without grave and weighty reasons. The end of every religion is the knowledge of God.

Q. Since when has "Râm Râm" been used as a salutation? and why do not Brâhmaṇas use it? Why do they use "Namaskara," and object to its use by non-Brâhmaṇas? What does "Namaskara" mean?

Ans. Methods of salutation are matters of custom; in all nations greetings and farewells have been accompanied with divine names; the Englishman says, "Good-bye," *i. e.* "God be with you." The Frenchman says: "Adieu"; "To God," "I commend you to God," and so on. "Râm Râm" is a similar greeting, implying a benediction. "Namaskara" is simply: "I greet you." The restriction of special forms to special classes is of no importance.

Q. *Why are we prohibited from pronouncing our own name, or those of one's wife and eldest son?*

Ans. The wife's name is considered as too sacred to be commonly used. With regard to the other names, custom varies much in different parts of the country.

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Q. *Is pollution possible? If so, what pollutes a man?*

Ans. Pollution is obviously possible for the dense body; if you put your hand into filth of any kind, you pollute your hand. If you eat flesh or drink alcohol you pollute your body, and it smells unpleasant. You cannot see or smell the pollution of your finer bodies, but people who can see and smell in finer kinds of matter than those which affect most people, say that bad magnetism affects the Prâṇamayakosha, and pollutes it, just as filth pollutes the Annamayakosha. Also evil desires and thought similarly affect the Manomayakosha.

Q. *When rich but ignorant parents ask: what is the good of educating my girl? I have no answer that appeals to them. What can I say?*

Ans. It is very difficult to make ignorant people understand the value of education, as it is difficult to make a deaf person understand the pleasure given by music. Probably the only thing that would appeal to such people is to point out to them that in these days an uneducated girl is not likely to be happy in her home life, and will be looked down upon by her husband and his relatives. It may be also be urged that it is becoming increasingly difficult to find a respectable marriage for uneducated girls, and that they will have to put up with a very inferior son-in-law.

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Q. *Do we find fossils of Râkṣhasas, Gandharvas, etc.?*

Ans. The Râkṣhasas were, for the most part, people belonging to the Atlantean race, Turanians, and these must have left their skeletons behind them, but in countries in which geological research has not been largely carried on. Gandharvas are super-physical beings, and have no physical bodies to leave.

Q. *What is the meaning of the heading, "In the Crow's Nest" in the Central Hindû College Magazine?*

Ans. "The Crow's Nest" is the small enclosure at the top of the mast of a ship in which sits the man who is on the look-out. It means that the paragraphs found under it are of the nature of news, collected by looking out over the world.

Q. *What is the meaning of the English phrase "the three Rs."?*

Ans. Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. It means the elements of a simple education.

Q. *What is the meaning of "Paṇdiṭ"? Can a non-Brâhmaṇa be called Paṇdiṭ?*

Ans. Paṇdiṭ means a learned man, and as Brâhmaṇas were the learned class it became a title used solely by them. It is against social usage to give the name to a non-Brâhmaṇa, and is like

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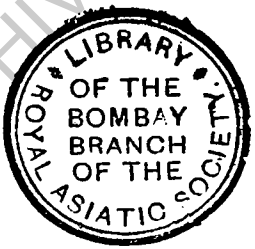
addressing a man who is not a baronet or knight as "Sir John Smith". No principle is involved in these matters, but well-bred people observe these social conventions, which mark gradations of rank in all well-ordered societies. To give a title of honor to one who has no right to it, or to withhold such a title from one to whom it belongs, is a mark of ignorance and bad manners.



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on 16 November, 2018

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